MYSTICISM IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLISH LITERATURE

By Elbert N. S. Thompson

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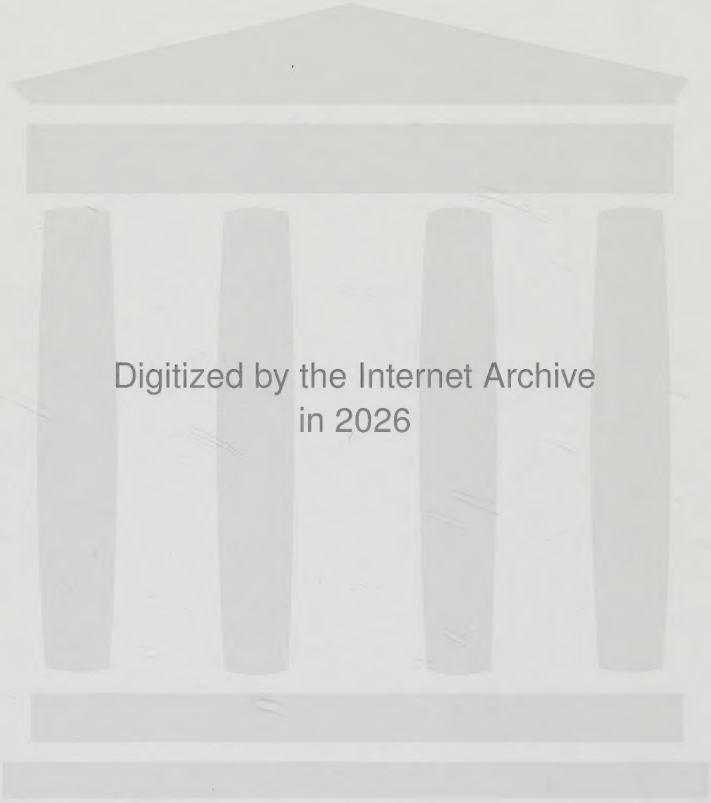
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By Elbert N. S. Thompson

Milton's undisguised scorn of the "libidinous and ignorant poetasters" of his generation may seem at first only another instance of his unbending attitude toward the lighter pleasures of the world.[1] Other poets, however, of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries condemn the exclusive absorption of sonneteers and pastoralists in themes of love, and offer as an offset their earnest pleas for sacred verse. For example, Robert Southwell, in the preface of *Saint Peter's Complaint* written eight years before the death of Elizabeth, accused poets of "abusing their talent, and making the follies and faynings of loue the customarie subiect of their base endeuours." Apparently, these amorists temporarily crowded all others from the field; for Nicholas Breton, in issuing *The Mothers Blessing,* complained, "that matter of good worth, either morall, or diuine, if it bee handled in verse, it is almost as ill as vertue; it will not sell almost for any thing." Yet only a few years later, George Herbert published *The Church Porch* with greater assurance, convinced that

> A verse may finde him who a sermon flies,
> And turn delight into a sacrifice.

Nor was his confidence in the appeal of sacred poetry misplaced. Before the close of the century other poets had voiced the sentiment of Herbert's sonnet beginning:

> My God, where is that antient heat towards thee
> Wherewith whole shoals of Martyrs once did burn,
> Besides their other flames? Doth Poetry
> Wear Venus' livery, only serve her turn?
> Why are not Sonnets made of thee, and layes
> Upon thine Altar burnt? Cannot thy love
> Heighten a spirit to sound out thy praise
> As well as any she?

[1] *Ch. Gov.*, 2, p. 480.

The popularity of sacred poetry throughout the seventeenth century was by no means a literary fashion. To be sure, Edmund Spenser, who exerted a dominant influence on the writers of the century succeeding, had lived to regret the "two Hymnes in the praise of love and beauty" composed "in the greener times of my youth," and had offered as atonement two corresponding hymns on heavenly love and beauty. Sir Philip Sidney's influence, too, wherever the *Apology* was known, operated in the same direction. Furthermore, the usage of French poets somewhat later encouraged Cowley and his contemporaries to handle Biblical story. Thus there came to be something of a vogue for sacred poetry. But its wide dissemination can not be attributed to fashion alone. The truly significant work of Vaughan, Traherne, Crashaw, Norris, Drummond, and many others came in response to the growing seriousness of the nation's temperament. Naturally, during the long and bitter conflict between the factions of the church, men's minds were chiefly engrossed in religious questions, and many poets turned from erotic songs to dedicate their talents to the church.

Much of this sacred writing lies altogether outside the province of mysticism, unless the term be employed so vaguely as to be quite meaningless. Much more of it, also, can not be classed as literature, but must be left to theology, controversy, or practical ethics. If the significance of the word, mysticism, however, be not unwarrantably restricted, a considerable body of the finest literature of the seventeenth century falls within its field. Bacon's prose essays and Herrick's charming songs would be the most notable exceptions. In the fourteenth century mysticism had risen to its highest level of power. Mechthild, Meister Eckhart, Tauler, Suso, Ruysbrock, Dante, St. Catherine of Sienna, Richard Rolle of Hampole, Walter Hilton, and Julian of Norwich all lived in that period. Their teaching in the vernacular determined to a great extent the thought of later generations. Hence in the seventeenth century, when English minds were deeply stirred by Christian theology, the undercurrent of mysticism came strongly to the surface, even though the English temperament has never been apt in abstract speculation, and though formal mysticism has not thriven naturally on English soil.

The etymologist might use the word mysticism, which is derived from a root signifying *close,* of "any secret language or ritual

which is understood only by the initiated"; or understand by the term the shutting of all ordinary channels of sensory impressions, so that the mystic becomes an "enclosed, self-withdrawn, introverted man." [2] But philosophers have commonly applied the word to a faith in "the internal manifestation of the Divine to the intuition or in the feeling of the secluded soul." Or, according to another definition, mysticism is "in its essence, a concentration of all the soul's energies upon a supernatural Object, conceived of and loved as a living personality." [3] This coincides with Dean Inge's idea that mysticism has its origin in a dim consciousness of the beyond, and is really an "attempt to realize the presence of the living God in the soul and in nature." He specifies as the foundation stones of such faith these four convictions: the soul as well as the eye can see and perceive; man in order to know God, must partake of his nature; without holiness no man can see God; and love is the sure guide on the upward path.[4] These various stipulations together describe a temperament or habit of mind that is familiar enough to readers of seventeenth-century English literature. Even if one agree with Miss Underhill that "more than the apprehension of God, then, more than the passion for the Absolute, is needed to make a mystic," these men of letters would still be included in her interpretation; for she continues: "These must be combined with an appropriate psychological make-up, with a nature capable of extraordinary concentration, an exalted moral emotion, a nervous organization of the artistic type." [5]

Although the English temperament has never been entirely sympathetic toward formal, strictly speculative, mysticism on the one hand, or its extreme sectarian manifestations on the other, many English poets have satisfied these broader requirements. In the heat of religious controversy a reaction developed against dogmatism and formalism in belief and worship. Heart-weariness, too, like Lord Falkland's oppressed many finer natures. And the natural desire of man to know more of life than earthly experience reveals, was intensified by the crisis through which the nation was passing. To the more artistic, susceptible temperament the world appeared

[2] R. A. Vaughan, *Hours with the Mystics*, 1, pp. 17-21.
[3] P. Berger, *William Blake*, p. 72.
[4] W. R. Inge, *Christian Mysticism*, pp. 5-8.
[5] *Mysticism*, p. 108.

suffused with heavenly light, and men, actuated by spiritual ideals, made the search for God the engrossing business of their lives.

A plain evidence of this mystical strain in English character is revealed by the experiences of children in the seventeenth century. In *Grace Abounding* John Bunyan placed on record his early sins of orchard-robbing, violation of the Fourth Commandment, and profanity. Clearly he had felt them most keenly in youth or they would not have given this morbid tinge to his mature consciousness. Even more acute were the religious sensibilities of Nicholas Ferrar. He was the son of a wealthy London merchant. At the age of six he was already thoroughly familiar with Hebrew history and had learned the Psalms by heart. One night, unable to sleep, he rose and walked into the garden. Throwing himself face downward on the ground, he cried: "Yes, there is, there must be a God: and he, no question, if I duly and earnestly seek it of him, will teach me not only how to know, but how to serve him acceptably. He will be with me all my life here, and at the end of it will make me happy hereafter." [6] Such emotion in childhood seems to us almost impossible; but Thomas Traherne told of a still more abnormal psychological experience. "Once I remember (I think I was about four years old) when I thus reasoned with myself. Sitting in a little obscure room in my father's poor house: If there be a God certainly He must be Infinite in Goodness, and that I was prompted to, by a real whispering instinct of nature. And if He be Infinite in Goodness and a perfect Being in Wisdom and Love, certainly He must do most glorious things and give us infinite riches; how comes it to pass, therefore, that I am so poor?" [7]

This "whispering instinct of nature" that Traherne mentioned, describes the very essence of mysticism; it is the reception of divine truth through hidden, spiritual channels. To search for it in the Bible as Milton did in compiling *Christian Doctrine* or to trust, as Hooker did, in Christian institutions, is not mysticism. The mystic takes usually an extremely individualistic point of view, like that of Herbert in the *Temple* or of Bunyan in *Pilgrim's Progress*. He turns his gaze inward, in the belief that the spirit of God is

[6] F. Turner, *Brief Memoirs*, pp. 5-6.
[7] *Meditations*, 2, 16.

within one, and that only an attentive heart is needed for a sensing of the truth.

Bunyan, Ferrar, and Traherne, whose experiences have just been cited, were all imbued with deeply religious instincts. The same strain, nevertheless, occasionally rose to the surface in writers so unspiritual as James Howell. Not simply to exhibit his facility of expression, but to convey as well a real experience to his readers, that interesting adventurer wrote to one of his friends:[8]

> So having got into a close field, I cast my face upword, and fell to consider what a rare prerogative the optic virtue of the Eye hath, much more the *intuitive* virtue in the Thought, that the one in a moment can reach Heaven, and the other go beyond it. . . . What then should we think of the magnitude of the Creator himself. Doubtless, 'tis beyond the reach of any human imagination to conceive it: In my private devotions I presume to compare Him to a great Mountain of Light, and my soul seems to discern some glorious Form therein; but suddenly as she would fix her eyes upon the Object, her sight is presently dazzled and disgregated with the refulgency and corruscations thereof.

Life, one suspects, in the seventeenth century had been set in part to a new key. The court, be it granted, was more corrupt than it had been. Hence it is not false to stress the difference between the new type of courtier and the old, between knights such as Sir Kenelm Digby and Sir John Suckling on the one hand, and Sir Philip Sidney and Sir Walter Raleigh, on the other. But the great bulk of the people in the later generation was at heart religious. Although it was in many ways an intensely practical age, even in their daily affairs men were governed by spiritual motives. Through all the active life and thinking of the time, the spiritual and the worldly operate together, as they do, for example, in those strange camp-letters of Sergeant Nehemiah Wharton. Many men lived through such an experience as Mrs. Browning's:

> When I, who thought to sink,
> Was caught up into love and taught the whole
> Of life in a new rhythm.[9]

And lessons so learned when the spiritual nature was set to this new rhythm were carried through in the humdrum duties of ordinary life; for in Matthew Arnold's words,

[8] *Familiar Letters*, 2, 50.
[9] *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, 7.

Tasks in hours of insight will'd
Can be through hours of gloom fulfill'd.[10]

The experience has been by no means uncommon, especially among poets, who have risen most readily from what Eucken calls the natural to the spiritual level.[11] On that level, man perceives through new channels, and perhaps is only understood by those who feel with him.

The difference between these two grades of experience has been well stated by Eucken and Bergson, but it would be better to let some of the old mystical writers present it in their own defence. The fact in question is quaintly recognized in the passage of the *Religio Medici* beginning: "Thus is Man that great and true Amphibium, whose nature is disposed to live, not onely like other creatures in divers elements, but in divided and distinguished worlds: for though there be but one to sense, there are two to reason, the one visible, the other invisible."[12] And possibly the ablest defence of this reading of life is presented by John Norris. He was born in 1657 in Wiltshire and received his education at Winchester and Oxford. Then in 1691 he took the parish at Bemerton, where holy George Herbert had closed his career in 1633. In that quiet spot, Norris preached and studied and wrote, until in 1711 he died, "having exhausted his strength by intense application and long habits of severe reasoning." On the south side of the little church a tablet marks the grave of the "Recluse of Bemerton."

John Norris recognized the difference between man's perceptive faculties on the lower and higher levels of existence. His poem, *The Discouragement,* reads in part:

Thought I, for anything I know,
What we have stamp'd for science here,
Does only the appearance of it wear,
And will not pass above, tho current here below;
Perhaps they've other rules to reason by,
And what's truth here, with them's absurdity.
We truth by a refracted ray
View, like the sun at ebb of day;
Whom the gross, treacherous atmosphere,
Makes where it is not, to appear.

[10] *Morality.*

[11] See E. Underhill, *Mysticism,* pp. 36, 40.

[12] *Religio Medici,* I. 34.

In order to justify his belief that man's greatest good is nearness to this higher sphere of life, Norris wrote again in *On a Musician:*

> Poor dull mistake of low mortality,
> To call that madness which is ecstacy.
> 'Tis no disorder of the brain,
> His soul is only set t'an higher strain.
> Out-soar he does the sphere of common sense,
> Rais'd to diviner excellence;
> But when at highest pitch, his soul out-flies,
> Not reason's bounds, but those of vulgar eyes.

This is the mystic's best defence. He rises above the changing, temporal world to another by purely inner motive forces, and, although others may judge him abnormal or even mad, he realizes that he differs from them only in the possession of a truer sanity, a farther vision, than theirs.

Because English poetry has been colored at all times by mystical feeling, the poets of the seventeenth century had necessarily their forerunners in the sixteenth. It was mysticism of the Platonic sort that Spenser, especially in *The Fowre Hymnes,* brought into literature. But Spenser, like Milton, was too eclectic, too comprehensive, to be classed simply as a mystic. Of the early poets the Catholic martyr, Robert Southwell, would be more adequately described by that term.

Southwell was born in 1560 or 1561 and suffered death because of his faith in 1595. Knowing the imprisonment and tortures that he was forced to undergo, a reader finds an especial poignancy in some of his lyrics. Many other Elizabethans had written on the variability of Fortune and the futility of worldly ambition; but what Southwell wrote in confinement comes to us fraught with deeper than ordinary feeling. His condition there was "deplorable and full of fears and dangers"; others, his friends whom he mentions in the letter to his father, had already suffered "such cruel usages . . . as can scarce be believed." But as he fortified himself to "suffer anything that can come, how hard soever it may be," he realized that "life is but loss" and eased his heart in the lyric:

> By force I live, in will I wish to dye,
> In playnte I passe the length of lingring dayes;
> Free would my soule from mortall body flye,
> And tredd the track of death's desyrèd waies:

Life is but losse where death is deemèd gaine,
And loathèd pleasures breed displeasinge payne.

The first significant feature of Southwell's poems is the stress that they place on the inner life to the disregard of the outer—the true mystic's point of view. "Not where I breath, but where I love, I live," he declared in one poem, and in another he returned to the same thought in the lines:

Who lives in love, loves lest to live,
And longe delayes doth rue,
If Him he love by Whome he lives,
To Whome all love is dewe.
. . . . . .
Mourne, therefore, no true lover's death,
Life onely him annoyes;
And when he taketh leave of life,
Then love beginns his joyes.

Viewing the world in this way, Southwell, even in his distress, experienced true inward happiness:

My conscience is my crowne,
Contented thoughts my rest;
My hart is happy in it selfe,
My blisse is in my breste.[18]

Thus Southwell schooled himself to overlook confinement and torture, which were mere accidents of his bodily existence, and to think simply of his spiritual state, of which alone he could boast full control.

On this matter Southwell reflects very plainly the influence of Plato. To them both this world with its seeming reality is merely the shadow of the stable, ideal world, and nowhere here on earth can one find more than imperfect copies of the true beauty, love, justice, and honor that exist elsewhere. One of the most thoughtful of the poems that develop the contrast between the earthly and the ideal reality is *Looke Home:*

Retyrèd thoughtes enjoy their own delightes,
As beauty doth in self-behoulding eye;
Man's mynde a mirrhour is of heavenly sightes,
A breife wherein all marveylls summèd lye,
Of fayrest formes and sweetest shapes the store,
Most gracefull all, yet thought may grace them more.

[18] See *I Dye Alive, Life's Death, Love's Life,* and *Content and Ritche.*

The mynde a creature is, yet can create,
To Nature's paterns adding higher skill;
Of fynest workes witt better could the state
If force of witt had equall poure of will;
Devise of man in working hath no ende;
What thought can thinke an other thought can mende.

Man's soule of endles bewtye's image is,
Drawen by the worke of endles skill and might;
This skillfull might gave many sparkes of blisse,
And to discerne this blisse a native light;
To frame God's image as His worthes requir'd,
His might, His skill, His worde and will conspir'd.

All that he had His image should present,
All that it should present he could afforde,
To that he coulde afforde his will was bente,
His will was followed with performinge worde;
Lett this suffice, by this conceave the rest,
He should, he could, he would, he did the best.

Few of Southwell's poems are so charged with thought as is this. It contains not only the Platonic concept of an ideal world, of which this is but an imperfect copy, but also Southwell's faith in the "native light" of the soul and the creative force of the mind and his confident optimism. Of these ideas Coleridge's exposition of the "esemplastic principle," "the shaping spirit of imagination," and Leibnitz's doctrine that this is the best possible world, are but enlargements.

The usual conclusion, however, of Southwell's reasoning is that man's chief happiness lies in his ability to rise to this perfect state. He cries in one lyric:

Fayre soule! how long shall veyles thy graces shroud?
How long shall this exile withold thy right?
When will thy sunn disperse this mortall cloude,
And give thy glories scope to blaze their light?
O that a starr, more fitt for angells' eyes,
Should pyne in earth, not shyne above the skyes! [14]

And in another poem Southwell attempts to show the reasonableness of his position:

Misdeeming Eye! that stoopest to the lure
Of mortall worthes, not worth so worthy love;

[14] *At Home in Heaven.*

All beautye's base, all graces are impure,
That do thy erring thoughtes from God remove.
Sparkes to the fire, the beames yeld to the sunne,
All grace to God, from Whome all graces runne.

If picture move, more should the paterne please;
No shadow can with shadowed thinge compare,
And fayrest shapes, whereon our loves do ceaze,
But sely signes of God's high beautyes are.
Go, sterving sense, feede thou on earthly maste;
Trewe love, in heaven seeke thou thy sweete repast.[15]

But in addition to this more common reflection of the Dialogues, Southwell's thought embraces much Neo-Platonism. Its almost inevitable tendency to pantheism, for example, is reflected in the phrase " God present is at once in every place." Yet this belief in the essential unity of creation, all being but an emanation from God, does not lessen Southwell's sense of man's individuality, or God's; for " One soule in man is all in everye part," and " God in every place is ever one." [16]

Seldom, however, do the English poets lose themselves in the speculations of the Christian Platonists. The reader, then, is not puzzled, as he is in reading Ficino, Bruno, or Boehme, with strange terms and difficult abstractions. The task set the reader of these poets is to look on life as they depict it and see nothing incongruous in their forms of expression. For example, in addressing the wound in Christ's side in this concrete way,

O pleasant port! O place of rest!
O royal rift! O worthy wound!
Come harbour me, a weary guest,
That in the world no ease have found,

Southwell may seem to materialize his purely spiritual emotion. But the finding in everything visible and tangible a sacrament of spiritual life is an ever-present trait of mysticism, which often brings into sacred verse the appearence of materialism and irreverence. The reader has to perceive, as the author does, what lies beyond the symbols used to express the emotion. If this be done, such a poem as *The Burning Babe,* possibly Southwell's finest, can be appreciated for its simplicity, its power, its vision.

[15] *Lewd Love is Losse.*
[16] *Of the Blessed Sacrament.*

As I in hoary Winter's night stood shiveringe in the snowe,
Surpris'd I was with sodayne heat, which made my hart to glowe;
And liftinge upp a fearefull eye to vewe what fire was nere,
A prety Babe all burninge bright, did in the ayre appeare,
Who scorchèd with excessive heate, such floodes of teares did shedd,
As though His floodes should quench His flames which with His teares were fedd;
Alas! quoth He, but newly borne, in fiery heates I frye,
Yet none approch to warme their hartes or feele my fire but I!
My faultles brest the fornace is, the fuell woundinge thornes,
Love is the fire, and sighes the smoke, the ashes shame and scornes;
The fuell Justice layeth on, and Mercy blowes the coales,
The mettall in this fornace wrought are men's defilèd soules,
For which, as nowe on fire I am, to worke them to their good,
So will I melt into a bath to washe them in My bloode:
With this He vanisht out of sight, and swiftly shroncke awaye,
And straight I callèd unto mynde that it was Christmas-daye.

In all these respects the poems of Southwell represent Platonism as it was adapted to the Christian belief by early churchmen and transmuted by the art of modern poets. For the Christian philosopher Platonism would signify, "an unshaken confidence in the ultimate validity of ideas, with a tendency to suspect the data of the senses, and to insist on the unreality of the phenomenal." [17] A Platonist, consequently, would believe that, transcending the reach of sensory experience and reason, there is a mystic, spiritual way of apprehending ultimate truth. He would find in the *Dialogues*, likewise, confirmation of his belief in the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, and would accept, as kindred teaching, the idea of an unchanging, intelligible world above this world of shadows, and would stress the need of focussing our aspirations on that other world. Such were the lessons that Plotinus for the philosophers and Augustine for the churchmen learned from Plato.

The influence of Plato during the seventeenth century made itself felt in English scholarship chiefly at Cambridge, and in English poetry mainly through the writings of Edmund Spenser. At Cambridge Neo-Platonism found the soil best adapted to its growth, Spenser, himself a student of Pembroke Hall, wove together in *The Fowre Hymnes* and the first book especially of the *Faerie Queene* the fundamental teachings of the Socratic dialogues. Then from Spenser, who exerted the most potent single influence on the poets

[17] P. H. Wicksteed, *Dante and Aquinas*, p. 25.

of the next century, the influence of Plato was handed down to Southwell, Drummond, Milton, and their contemporaries.

Bearing this in mind one appreciates the historical position of the work done in his secluded home by William Drummond of Hawthornden. The opening sonnet of *Flowres of Sion,* after exhibiting "the instability of mortall glorie," concludes with the lines:

> Wherefore (my Minde) above Time, Motion, Place,
> Thee raise, and Steppes, not reach'd by Nature trace.

The fourth sonnet, likewise, which Professor Kastner has traced to Petrarch employs these comparisons to expose the unreality of this life:

> The wearie Mariner so fast not flies
> An howling Tempest, Harbour to attaine,
> Nor Sheepheard hastes, when frayes of Wolves arise,
> So fast to Fold to save his bleeting Traine:
> As I (wing'd with Contempt and just Disdaine)
> Now flie the World, and what it most doth prize,
> And Sanctuarie seeke, free to remaine
> From wounds of abject Times, and Envies eyes.

In the same key another sonnet was written:

> Why (worldlings) do ye trust fraile honours dreams?
> And leane to guilted Glories which decay?

and in another Drummond makes this resolve:

> Hencefoorth on Thee (mine onelie Good) I thinke,
> For onelie Thou canst grant what I doe crave.[18]

The same ideas recur again and again in the poetry of Drummond's age. Nicholas Breton, for instance, feeling the unreality of the phenomenal world, turned to the ideal:

> In Nature's beautie, all the best can be
> Are shadowing colours to deceiue the eye:
> But in this beautie may our spirits see
> A light wherein we live, and cannot die.[19]

This light, of course, is God, and God, whom he identifies with Love, is the source of all things. Breton's own words are:

[18] *Sonnets,* 20, 5.
[19] *Solus in toto laudandus Deus.*

> And this is God, and this same God is Love;
> For God and Love, in Charitie are one,

and

> One onely light that shewes one onely Love:
> One onely Love, and that is God above.

Assuredly, much of this poetry is imitative and uninspired. A reader is apt to remember only the first line of George Daniel's effort that begins:

> Lord! yet How dull am I?
> When I would flye;
> Up to the Region of thy Glories.[20]

It frequently happens, therefore, that certain ideas of Plato are incorporated in the writings of poets who are not mystics at all. Lord Herbert, for example, never rose to anything higher than this *Meditation:*

> More more our Souls then, when they go from hence,
> And back unto the Elements dispense,
> All that built up our frail and earthly frame
> Shall through each pore and passage make their breach,
> Till they with all their faculties do reach
> Unto that place from whence at first they came.
> . . . . . .
> And therefore I who do not live and move
> By outward sense so much as faith and love,
> Which is not in inferior Creatures found,
> May unto some immortal state pretend,
> Since by these wings I hitherto may ascend
> Where faithful loving Souls with joys are crown'd.[21]

Yet no one would be impelled by even these verses to count the Quixotic knight of the Autobiography among the mystics. Even his brother, George Herbert, had little if any mysticism in his temperament. His poems show an unfaltering sense of the nearness of God; mind and heart alike are wholly preoccupied with thoughts of him. In certain of his poems, furthermore, Herbert accepts the teachings of Plato. Of these pieces, the most obvious is the sonnet beginning, "Immortal Love, author of this great frame." Yet never in the *Temple* is there a vision as clear as Vaughan's

[20] Ed. A. B. Grosart, p. 13.
[21] See too *The Idea.*

I saw eternity the other night
Like a great Ring of pure and endless light,
All calm, as it was bright,

or,

I see them walking in an Air of glory,
Whose light doth trample on my days:
My days, which are at best but dull and hoary,
Meer glimering and decays.

Something more, then, than an occasional acceptance of Plato's thought is needed to make a mystic.

No one of these poets represents all sides of Plato's varied genius so well as Spenser.[22] Like Plato, Spenser was endowed with both a highly spiritual and a richly sensuous temperament, so that he enjoyed to the fullest the beauty of the visible world and the impulse of the spiritual life. Both men had a marked gift for allegorical narrative, and each valued literature chiefly for its moral or ethical import. Not any of the lesser poets following Spenser was deep and broad enough in mental grasp to embrace all this; for even Milton could not harmonize all these diverse elements. Among late Elizabethan poets, then, we must look for Platonism in one or another of its partial manifestations.

One of Drummond's most interesting poems, *An Hymn of the Fairest Fair,* contains in addition to its strict Platonism a good deal that Christian mystics had taught of God and the world. The poet conceives God, to whom his aspirations rise, as the great creator, who in his love called forth into existence all things that are.

I Feele my Bosome glow with wontlesse Fires,
Rais'd from the vulgar prease my Mind aspires
(Wing'd with high Thoghts) vnto his praise to clime,
From deepe Eternitie who call'd foorth Time;
That Essence which not-mou'd makes each thing moue,
Vncreat'd Beautie all-creating Loue;
But by so great an object, radient light,
My Heart appall'd, enfeebled restes my Sight,
Thicke Cloudes benighte my labouring Ingine,
And at my high attempts my Wits repine.

Through these clouds, despite his thwarted faculties, the poet sees God on his throne:

[22] L. Winstanley, *The Fowre Hymnes* and J. S. Harrison, *Platonism in English Poetry.*

> As farre beyond the starrie walles of Heaven,
> As is the loftiest of the Planets seuen
> Sequestred from this Earth, in purest light,
> Out-shining ours, as ours doth sable Night,
> Thou, All-sufficient, Omnipotent,
> Thou euer-glorious, most excellent,
> God various in Names, in Essence one,
> High art enstalled on a golden Throne,
> Out-reaching Heavens wide Vastes, the Bounds or nought,
> Transcending all the Circles of our Thought.

After this mystical vision of God, dwelling in indescribable light, far transcending all powers of thought, and boundless in his reach, Drummond attempts to define his being. He first stresses the unity of God, arguing that the Trinity, though threefold and symbolized in human life by the understanding, memory, and will, is one, as spring, well-head, and stream are one. He regards this God as the center of all life, and explains the creation according to Plotinus' doctrine of emanation. God first brought forth the "immortal Traines of Intellectuall Powr's" who attend him. They are ranged about the throne in heavenly bands, according to the hierarchic scheme of Dionysius. Beneath these heavenly hosts is the great and manifold world of nature,

> The Organes of thy Prouidence diuine,
> Bookes euer open, Signes that clearlie shine.[23]

Then human life finds its place. Originally, man stood above nature, until the sin in the garden displaced him; all nature served him, and angels passed freely from heaven to earth. Over this vast creation, spiritual and material, God rules in perfect unity. Yet Drummond sees his spirit everywhere;

> Whole and entire all in thy Selfe thou art,
> All-where diffus'd, yet of this all no part,
> For infinite, in making this faire Frame,
> (Great without quantitie) in all thou came,
> And filling all, how can thy State admit,
> Or Place or Substance to be voide of it?

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[23] Cf. Dionysius the Areopagite: "All things have emanated from God, and the end of all is return to God," and "The degree of real existence possessed by any being is the amount of God in that being." From Vaughan, I, pp. 113-115. The orders assigned by Dionysius to the heavenly hosts are fully explained by the seventeenth-century poet and playwright, Thomas Heywood, in *The Hierarchy of the Blessed Angels.*

So also are all times present to him;

> All Times to thee are one, that which hath runne,
> And that which is not brought yet by the Sunne,
> To thee are present, who dost alwayes see
> In present act, what past is or to bee.

This entire conception is in harmony with the teaching of the mystics. One is not surprised, then, to find the poem closing with their sense of the incomprehensibility of God.

> O King, whose Greatnesse none can comprehend,
> Whose boundlesse Goodnesse doth to all extend,
> Light of all Beautie, Ocean without ground,
> That standing flowest, giuing dost abound,
> Rich palace, and Indweller euer blest,
> Neuer not working euer yet in Rest;
> What wit cannot conceiue, words say of Thee,
> Heere where as in a Mirrour wee but see,
> Shadowes of shadowes, Atomes of thy Might,
> Still owlie eyed when staring on thy Light,
> Grant that released from this earthly Iaile,
> And fred of Clouds which heere our Knowledge vaile,
> In Heauens high Temples, where thy Praises ring,
> I may in sweeter Notes heare Angels sing.

In perfect keeping with this great poem is Drummond's solemn, awe-inspired meditation in prose on death. Many of the thoughts of *A Cypresse Grove* came to the author from foreign sources, Montaigne's *Essais,* Charron's *De la Sagesse,* and Ringhiere's *Dialoghi della vita et della morte.*[24] But the stately movement of the prose and the rich coloring, are Drummond's own. He had brooded in quiet on this question of life and death until his thoughts, whatever their sources may have been, belonged to him. The world is beautiful, he sees, and the body serves the needs of the soul; but, for all that, it is no fearful thing to die. "My Soule, what aileth thee," he cries, "to bee thus backward and astonished, at the remembrance of Death, sith it doth not reach Thee, more than Darknesse doth those farre-shining Lampes above?" Death merely permits man, like a storm-tossed mariner, to "stricke Saile and joyfullie enter the leas of a save Harbour."[25] Even savages have had "some roving guesses at Ages to come, and a Glow-worme

[24] See notes to Professor Kastner's edition.
[25] II, pp. 89-90.

light of another life." Drummond's own vision of that other life is finely expressed at the close: "Then shall there bee an end without an end, Time shall finish, and Place shall bee altered, Motion yeelding vnto Rest, and another World of an Age eternall and vnchangeable shall arise."

Thus the English sacred poets, true Platonists that they were, habitually contrasted the unreality of this world with the reality of the other. No one of them was more deeply imbued with this feeling than Henry Vaughan, the Welsh physician. Riding along the rustic roads on his professional errands, he was keenly alive to all the beauties of nature, especially the stars, God's "hosts of spyes." But he looked on these natural objects only as symbols of a higher beauty, "whose meaner showes and outward utensils these glories are." [26] Such a temperament may have been in the mind of John Norris when he wrote: "How happy is the Man that can do so! that can Conduct and Govern his Steps by the bright Views of the other world and not by the dim appearances of this." [27]

Lovers of Wordsworth, therefore, have always taken a peculiar interest in Vaughan. The great romantic poet was oppressed with the idea that "the world is too much with us." Owing to exactly the same distrust of the business of life, Vaughan long before had written:

> The world
> Is full of voices; Man is call'd, and hurl'd
> By each; he answers all,
> Knows ev'ry note, and call,
> Hence, still
> Fresh dotage tempts, or old usurps his will.[28]

Vaughan's prayer then is:

> Come and releive,
> And tame, and keepe downe with thy light
> Dust that would rise and dimme my sight!
> Lest left alone too long
> Amidst the noise and throng,
> Oppressed I,
> Striving to save the whole, by parcels dye.

Or again, his mind still running in grooves that Wordsworth's followed, he petitions for

[26] *Midnight*, p. 36, *Retirement*, p. 92.
[27] *A Discourse of Walking by Faith*, p. 134.
[28] *Distraction*, p. 413.

A living Faith, a Heart of flesh,
The World an Enemie.[29]

Yet from inanimate nature Vaughan derived many truly Wordsworthian lessons. Everything, as he understood the world, joins in praise of the Creator;

So hills and valleys into singing break,
And though poor stones have neither speech nor tongue,
While active winds and streams both run and speak,
Yet stones are deep in admiration.[30]

Consequently in *The Starre,* Vaughan resolves:

Yet, seeing all things that subsist and be
Have their Commissions from Divinitie,
And teach us duty, I will see
What man may learn from thee.

From the lessons so learned came Vaughan's highest inspiration. One of the finest of his poems, though it was prompted by a verse of *Romans,* expresses only this fervent belief in the spirituality of all nature.

And do they so? have they a Sense
Of ought but Influence?
Can they their heads lift, and expect,
And grone too? why th' Elect,
Can do no more: my volumes sed
They were all dull, and dead;
They judg'd them senselesse and their state
Wholly Inanimate.
Go, go; Seal up thy looks,
And burn thy books!

I would I were a stone, or tree,
Or flowre by pedigree,
Or some poor high-way herb, or Spring
To flow, or bird to sing!
Then should I (tyed to one sure state,)
All day expect my date;
But I am sadly loose, and stray
A giddy blast each way.
O let me not thus range!
Thou canst not change.

This is possibly Vaughan's most usual theme. In moments when such impulse does not move him he often grows dull and clumsy

[29] *Day of Judgment,* p. 403. [30] *The Bird,* p. 497.

in thought and expression. He is invariably weakest if mind rather than sub-conscious emotion assumes the creative rôle. But whenever the world appears radiant with this white, heavenly light, the poet's emotion quickens, and moves upward on the spiritual ladder that mystics coveted to find.

So in Vaughan's eyes the world appeared as it did to the Spanish mystic, Rose of Lima. For her the whole creation was filled with God. At sunrise she passed through her garden and invited all objects there to join her hymn of praise. The trees bowed as she passed by; the flowers swayed on their stalks and opened to the light; the birds sang and even the insects voiced their adoration.[31] Strange as all this seems, Vaughan too had experienced it;

> When in the East the Dawn doth blush,
> Here cool, fresh Spirits the air brush;
> Herbs (strait) get up; Flow'rs peepe and spread;
> Trees whisper praise, and bow the head.
> Birds from the shades of night releast
> Look round about, then quit the neast,
> And with united gladness sing
> The glory of the morning's King.
> The Hermit hears, and with meek voice
> Offers his own up, and their Joys;
> Then prays, that all the world may be
> Blest with as sweet an unity.[32]

Another poet-mystic, Thomas Traherne, loved nature in this same two-fold way—for its own beauty and as a symbol of the divine. That retired clergyman, though, seems never to have seen it in its proper earthly light, but always suffused with a sheen from heaven. Like Wordsworth, he had felt the shades of the "prison house" closing upon him as a growing boy, and had found himself in "a waste place covered with idleness and play, and shops, and markets, and taverns."[33] Life was only interesting as it appeared to him illuminated by his own unique personality. What this was, his own words can best reveal:

> The corn was orient and immortal wheat which never should be reaped nor was ever sown. I thought it had stood from everlasting to everlasting. The dust and stones of the street were as precious as gold: the gates were

[31] E. Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 313.
[32] *The Bee*, p. 652.
[33] *Meditations*, 3. 14.

at first the end of the world. The green trees when I saw them first through one of the gates transported and ravished me; their sweetness and unusual beauty made my heart to leap, and almost mad with ecstacy, they were such strange and wonderful things. The Men! O what venerable and reverend creatures did the aged seem! Immortal Cherubims! And young men glittering and sparkling angels, and maids strange seraphic pieces of life and beauty! Boys and girls tumbling in the street were moving jewels; I knew not that they were born or should die.[34]

Just this same shimmer of unreality plays over Traherne's poems. Looking out on the world, he asks,

> Where are the silent streams,
> The living waters and the glorious beams,
> The sweet reviving bowers,
> The shady groves, the sweet and curious flowers,
> The springs and trees, the heavenly days,
> The flow'ry meads, and glorious rays,
> The gold and silver towers?

Here, through this strange environment, moved no real substantial human figures;

> The streets were paved with golden stones,
> The boys and girls were mine,
> Oh how did all their lovely faces shine!
> The sons of men were holy ones,
> In joy and beauty they appeared to me,
> And every thing which here I found,
> While like an angel I did see,
> Adorned the ground.[35]

Such complete transformation of reality can be found in English literature only in the work of Traherne and Blake. Reality to both men was entirely subjective not objective; for they gained consciousness of the finite through the infinite, as Malbranche did. Traherne seems even to anticipate the later philosophic denial of material reality. In *The Preparative,* at least, he writes:

> 'Tis not the object, but the light
> That maketh Heaven: 'tis a purer sight.
> Felicity
> Appears to none but them that purely see.

The possession of this purer sight determined Traherne's peculiar temperament, and in his verse and prose alike there runs a mystical

[34] *Ibid.*, 3. 3.

[35] *Desire*, p. 120; *Wonder*, p. 5.

philosophy that resembles closely the subjective idealism of the nineteenth century.

No one of these mystical poets, in calling on man to rise to a higher spiritual existence, meant any disparagement of the world in which our lives are passed. They were Platonists, in that regard, rather than Neo-Platonists. The material world, however unreal and shadow-like it may be called, is rich in beauty, and, as a symbol of the higher life, filled with significance. This idea is the most pervading of the few threads of mystical thought that are woven into Habington's *Castara*. The same opinion of the world appears is Crashaw's highly mystical poetry. And Francis Quarles, after the ascetic's indictment,

> False world, thou ly'st: thou canst not lend
> The least delight,

can argue as a true Platonist that this world is fair only in comparison with another. But possibly the best example of a poet's reconciling his love for things seen with a contempt bred of a stronger love elsewhere, is found in John Norris's *Aspiration*. Looking forth from the "dark prison" in which his soul lay enchained, Norris exclaimed:

> How cold this clime! and yet my sense
> Perceives even here thy influence.
> Even here thy strong magnetic charms I feel,
> And pant and tremble like the amorous steel.
> To lower good, and beauties less divine
> Sometimes my erroneous needle does decline;
> But yet—so strong the sympathy—
> It turns, and points again to thee.

A reader who has become accustomed to the poet's way of harmonizing these two feelings will not see in the opening lines of *Comus* any indication of that disregard of nature that Milton so unjustly has been accused of showing. It would be needless to quote Milton's vision of the life

> In regions mild of calm and serene air,
> Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot
> Which men call earth.

Less commonly known is the beautiful sentiment of Vaughan at the close of *The World:*

Yet some, who all this while did weep and sing,
And sing, and weep, soar'd up into the Ring,
But most would use no wing.
O fools (said I,) thus to prefer dark night
Before true light,
To live in grots, and caves, and hate the day
Because it shews the way,
The way which from this dead and dark abode
Leads up to God,
A way where you might tread the Sun, and be
More bright than he.

The same aspiration evokes the prayer:

Grant I may so
Thy steps track here below,
That in these Masques and shadows I may see
Thy sacred way;
And by those hid ascents climb to that day,
Which breaks from thee
Who art in all things, though invisibly.

And with these lines come to mind many other poems by Vaughan, such as the lyric

My Soul, There is a Countrie
Afar beyond the stars;

for he had come to the belief that some men "walk to the skie even in this life." Hence, although he felt a deep joy in this world, he loved the other so much more fervently that his creed is wholly summed up in these two injunctions: "run on and reach home with the light" and "fill thy bresst with home." [36]

Men of a more metaphysical turn of mind, like the poet's brother, Thomas Vaughan, often sought in philosophy a reason for this uprising of the soul. Plotinus and the Neo-Platonists had explained the creation of the universe as a process of emanation. Every part of the universe came forth, more or less immediately, from the creative energy of God, and each part, still moved by God's spirit, craves union with him. No other force is necessary to raise Dante in the *Paradise* swiftly through the heavens; for the soul ascends as naturally as flame rises or as water in a rivulet flows to a lower level. Milton's acceptance of at least the physical aspects of the

[36] See *Man, Peace, Ascension Hymn, The Resolve,* and *The Proffer.*

theory is revealed in *Paradise Lost,*[37] while John Norris in the Hymn on the Creation considers its spiritual significance in these lines:

> We, acted by the weights of strong desire
> To good without ourselves aspire,
> We're always moving hence
> Like lines from the circumference,
> To some more inlodg'd excellence,
> But He is one unmov'd self-center'd point of rest.

As a rule, however, the poets have dwelt but little on the metaphysics of the question: it was with them, as with Henry Vaughan, a feeling and not a theory—"a roving extasie to find my Saviour."[38]

Of all the poets of the Jacobean age Donne would be least suspected of a mystical turn of mind. His keen, restless intellect, his constant dependence on the external features of daily life for his illustrative material, as well as his open cynicism and irreverence in the *Elegies* and *Songs,* would isolate him, necessarily it appears, from the spiritual forces of the day. This, however, was not the case. Cynicism, impudent ribaldry, realism tingle in his early verse. Yet not even Browning recognized more unqualifiedly than Donne that the life of the spirit is the matter of sole moment to man.

> I wonder by my troth what thou and I
> Did till we loved,

he asks, forgetful of all the soul-stirring episodes of his venturesome youth. This was not because Donne scorned or despised our bodies: rather,

> We owe them thankes, because they thus,
> Did us, to us, at first convay,
> Yeelded their forces, sense, to us,
> Nor are drosse to us, but allay.[39]

But the spirit's welfare seemed of greater importance than the body's. The passion of true love, for example, can so unite two persons that they become as one;

> Love, these mixt soules, doth mixe againe,
> And makes both one, each this and that.

[37] *Par.,* 1; *P. L.,* 5, ll. 414-426. [38] *The Search.*
[39] *The Extasie,* p. 52.

Once so united, a separation is impossible, whatever the accidents of life may be; for

> They who one another keepe
> Alive, ne'r parted bee.[40]

Love, in other words, is a passion of the heart that raises man above the limiting conditions of physical existence into the freedom of the spiritual world. And by mental energy even God and man are united; for God is both the ultimate end of knowledge and the source of knowledge in man. This is the meaning of the strange lines of the *Second Anniversary:*

> Only who have enjoy'd
> The sight of God in fulness can think it;
> For it is *both the object and the wit.*

Therefore Donne could disregard material good fortune or ill fortune, seeing that

> Nothing
> Is worth our travaile, griefe, or perishing,
> But those rich joyes, which did possesse her heart.[41]

If this conviction be one of the foundation stones of Donne's poetry, the transition after all is not hard from the secular poems of his youth to the finest of his sacred verse, "At the round Earth's imagined corners blow" and "Death, be not proud."

In some notable respects Donne's habits of thought, like certain aspects of his temperament, were alien to mysticism. For example, he had sufficient trust in man's normal power to believe that "the articles of faith are discernible by reason." Upon that authority he rested his conviction "that as there is a God, that God must be worshipped according to his will, that therefore that will of God must be declared and manifested somewhere, that this is done in some permanent way, in some Scripture, which is the word of God, that this book, which we call the Bible, is, by better reason than any others can pretend, that Scripture." Trusting in such large part to reason, Donne naturally was suspicious of the mystic's dependence on direct revelation or illumination. He mentioned once, with condemnation, two classes of Pharisees, one that on the strength of its own reason separates from the church, the other that "dreams of such an union, such an identification with God

[40] *Song*, p. 18. [41] *First Anniversary*, p. 244.

in this life, as that he understands all things, not by the benefit of the senses, and impressions in the fancy and imagination, or by discourse and ratiocination, as we poor souls do, but by immediate and continual infusions and inspirations from God himself." [42] On either count the mystics were open to censure; for many of them showed little regard for Christian institutions and followed largely their own spiritual guidance. Donne would not atrophy man's undisputed prerogative, reason, for such accidental gifts as these.

Several of Donne's sermons, nevertheless, prove that the crucial experience of Paul's life exerted a peculiar fascination over him. He would still insist that "man hath a natural way to come to God, by the eye, by the creature; so visible things show the invisible God." But he also believed that "God hath superinduced a supernatural way, by the ear. . . . God shut up the natural way in Saul, seeing; he struck him blind; but he opened the supernatural way, he enabled him to hear, and to hear him." [43] Early mystics had slighted the former way of seeing God, the natural, to stress the latter, the supernatural. In the *Theologia Germanica,* for example, the soul is said to have two eyes, one for this world of time and place, the other for eternity. "But these two eyes of the soul," the old churchman continues, "cannot both perform their office at once; if the soul would look with the right eye into eternity, the left eye must be shut." [44] After the Reformation, however, mysticism more often taught that the truest apprehension of God comes from the harmonious operation of all our faculties.[45] This sane and practical view prevails in Donne's sermon.

Deeply versed as he was in all theology, Donne might have given, in either prose or verse, a full statement of the mystic's faith. Its whole essence is embraced in the declaration of his *Valediction,* "All divinity is love or wonder." But Donne went no farther. Of the English authors who were naturally inclined to this view, only John Norris and the group of Cambridge Platonists, especially Henry More, were metaphysicians. Hence the task that Donne might have shouldered was left chiefly to More.

At first sight, the Cambridge Platonists would hardly be sus-

[42] Sermon 47, vol. 2, pp. 371-372.
[43] Sermon 44, vol. 2, p. 310. [44] P. 201.
[45] W. R. Inge, *Christian Mysticism,* p. 299.

pected of being mystics at all. Theirs was a compromising party in the church, midway between the dogmatism of the Calvinists, on the one hand, and the high-church tendencies of Laud, on the other.[46] Owing to a natural alignment with the Puritan temperament, they turned from the questions of ecclesiastical organization that had engrossed the attention of churchmen, to consider deeper problems, such as the nature of religion, the relation of reason to faith, and the recognizability of religious truth.[47] They regarded religion as a temper of mind in which all of man's faculties work together in coöperation. Hence they confided much to reason, which appears to be the most distinctive human faculty, and denied its seeming hostility to faith. In short, religion, as they understood it, was neither belief nor conduct, but the man himself.[48]

Benjamin Whichcote, therefore, the leader of these liberal theologians, aimed to create at Cambridge "a spirit of sober piety and rational religion," and to establish the Christian belief on "some rational principle of certitude."[49] "We cannot ascend," he declared, "higher in our acting than we are in our Beings and Understanding."[50] On such a foundation religion loses its dogmatism. But Whichcote also slighted the mystical tendencies of churchmen. In his Sunday afternoon lectures he taught not only that "they do not advance Religion who draw it down to bodily acts," but also that those do not further it "who carry it up highest, into what is mystical, symbolical, emblematical." For, he asserted, the "Christian Religion is not mystical, symbolical, enigmatical, emblematical; but uncloathed, unbodied, intellectual, rational, spiritual."[51] Here Whichcote, like Donne in the passage recently quoted, implies a condemnation of Catholic mysticism. One might judge him to have been altogether rationalistic. In general, however, English men of letters, even the most mystical, held a sane, practical faith like this.

Whichcote was not the only Cambridge philosopher who harmonized these apparently opposed faculties of reason and faith. John Smith, for example, placed his trust on reason as a way to God.

[46] J. Tulloch, *Rational Theology*, 1, chaps. 1, 2.
[47] *Ibid.*, 2, p. 10.
[48] E. T. Campagnac, *Cambridge Platonists*, p. xv.
[49] *Ibid.*, p. 24.
[50] *Ibid.*, p. xxxi.
[51] *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

whereas many mystics emphasize the weakness and futility of our understanding. The Cambridge Platonists, like Donne, took the other view, in the belief that reason, as one of our God-given faculties, cannot be a stumbling block. Nathaniel Culverwell therefore said of faith and reason: "There is a twin-light springing from both, and they both spring from the same Fountain of light." [52] Beside this may be placed John Smith's statement: "Truth needs not at any time fly from reason, there being an eternal amity between them." Hence he accepted as valid both reason and intuition. As all higher knowledge of God, Smith taught, springs, from the soul, not the senses, so there is a power within us answering to the infinite power without us. If this be true, he was convinced that "Divine truth is better understood, as it unfolds itself in the purity of men's hearts and lives, than in all those subtle niceties into which curious wits may lay it forth." In another discourse Smith ventured the opinion that, "the common notions of God and virtue impressed upon the souls of men are more clear and perspicuous than any else." [53] All this shows clearly that Smith, like the mystics, believed that higher knowledge comes not from the senses but from a power in the soul responsive to a higher power without us. This power in the soul is in part reason and in part an impulse that can be known only in its manifestations. Man, would he learn the truth, must use them all.

On these matters Henry More worked in perfect accord with the other Cambridge Platonists. He defined religion as "the consecration and perfection of the natural life," and believed true holiness to be "the only safe entrance into divine knowledge" and reason "in some sort to be in God himself." [54] But from boyhood More had been trained in literature as well as in theology. Writing to his father the young author said: "You deserve the Patronage of better Poems than these, . . . you having from my childhood turned mine ears to Spensers rhymes, entertaining us on winter nights, with that incomparable Peice of his, The Fairy Queen, a Poem as richly fraught with divine Morality as Phansy." [55] In

[52] *Discourse of the Light of Nature*, "The Porch."
[53] See J. Tulloch, *Rational Theology*, 2, pp. 140, 145, 149.
[54] J. Tulloch, 2, pp. 312, 348, 354.
[55] *Philosophical Poems*, "To his dear Father," 1642.

later life, then, More combined these two interests, but is remembered less for his philosophical treatises than for his fantastical metaphysical poems, *Psychozoia, Psychathanasia,* and others like them.

More's poems deal primarily with the problems of speculative mysticism. He identified the three ultimate principles of Plotinus, the Good, Intellect, and Soul, with the three persons of the Trinity. In all created things he perceived the soul of the universe, since everything comes ultimately through the process of emanation from the Good. He held also that the soul is immaterial and immortal, and adduced arguments to prove its preëxistence. All these questions are argued through with the subtlety of a metaphysician.[56]

But in the poetry of this fantastically learned scholar, the simpler teachings of mysticism also appear. The chief and most natural desire of the soul, which is to see God, cannot be wholly realized. Nevertheless, a partial apprehension of him is granted us through a certain divinely given inner sight;

> **So that its plain that some kind of insight**
> **Of Gods own being in the soul doth dwell**
> **Though what God is we cannot yet so plainly tell.**[57]

Hence the effort to describe God, More quaintly says, is like trying to recall a forgotten name—one remembers first what it is not. Yet God will reveal himself most fully to that person who "by curbing sense and the self-seeking life" will strive "to mortifie our straitned selves." Just such an approach to God through self-denial is the doctrine preached in the *Theologia Germanica* and the *De Imitatione Christi.*

Again, More follows the usual teachings of the mystics in regarding love as the motive force of creation. He felt also that duly illumined souls even in this life may "have their aboad in Christs own body" and there be "eternally one with our God."[58] These thoughts occur as well in his *Minor Poems,* where More appears rather a religious mystic than a speculative philosopher. *The Philosophers Devotion,* for example, presents the old argument.

[56] See J. S. Harrison, *Platonism in English Poetry,* pp. 170-174, 187-193.
[57] *Psychathanasia,* 2. 3, 10.
[58] *Ibid.,* 3. 1, 30.

All things back from whence they sprong,
As the thankfull Rivers pay
What they borrowed of the Sea.

Again such simple mysticism is found in *Charitie and Humilitie:*

Farre have I clambred in my mind
But nought so great as love I find:
Deep-searching wit, mount-moving might
Are nought compar'd to that good spright.
Life of delight and soul of blisse!
Sure source of lasting happinesse!
Higher then Heaven! lower then hell
What is thy tent? where maist thou dwell!

My mansion hight humilitie
Heavens vastest capabilitie.
The further it doth downward tend
The higher up it doth ascend;
If it go down to utmost nought
It shall return with that it sought.

There is a vital difference, of course, between More's handling of these subjects and that of other poets. Wordsworth, Vaughan, and Traherne accept without question the belief in the soul's preexistence, where More labors to expound it. Yet his ideas are the same. The soul, he argued, is "a precious drop sunk from Æternitie." Here on earth, though, a soul "uncenters" itself; for "a fading light we lead in deadly influence," and

Thus groping after our own Centres near
And proper Substance, we grew dark, contract,
Swallow'd up of earthly life, ne what we were
Of old, through ignorance can we detect.

These halting lines may recall some of the finest passages of Wordsworth's *Ode*. Another such contrast may suggest itself to readers of Vaughan. In his prosy, bungling way, More compared the soul, encased in the body, to "a light fast-lock'd in lanthorn dark," through which "some weaker rayes . . . do glide," until

When we've past the perill of the way
Arriv'd at home, and laid that case aside,
The naked light how clearly doth it ray
And spread its joyfull beams as bright as Summers day.

The same analogy, which he had probably learned from Cornelius Agrippa, was in Vaughan's mind in the moment of real vision that

produced "They are all gone into the world of light"; but he handled it with the sure touch of an artist thus:

> If a star were confin'd into a tomb
> Her captive flames must needs burn there;
> But when the hand that lockt her up, gives room,
> She'l shine through all the sphare.

However devoted to Plato's doctrine this school of Cambridge philosophers may have been, their influence on the whole tended against mysticism. They were the rationalists in the church of their day, and mysticism has always discounted experience and reason as means to the highest truth. The more usual attitude, then, of the mystics toward reason is discernible in Crashaw's *Hymn of Saint Thomas:*

> Down, down, proud Sense! discourses dy!
> Keep close, my soul's inquiring ey!
> Nor touch, nor tast, must look for more
> But each sitt still in his own dore.
>
> Your ports are all superfluous here,
> Saue that which lets in Faith, the eare.
> Faith is my skill: Faith can beleiue
> As fast as Loue new lawes can giue.

The opposed viewpoint of the rationalists is plainly given in Samuel Butler's *Reflections upon Reason.* According to his definition, reason is "a Faculty of the Mind, whereby she puts the Notions and images of Things, with their Operations, Effects, and Circumstances, that are confused in the Understanding, into the same Order and Condition, in which they are really disposed by Nature, or Event." [59] He declares, too, that "Reason is the only Helm of the Understanding; the Imagination is but the Soul, apt to receive, and be carried away with every Wind of Vanity, unless it be steered by the former." But teaching of this sort was not common before the rise of the rationalistic philosophy of the eighteenth century.

Opposed to the cold logic of Butler are the finely colored poetic meditations of the genial old Norwich physician, Sir Thomas Browne. On all questions of science he depended strictly on observation and experiment. Thus, for example, in *Vulgar Errors*

[59] *Genuine Remains,* vol. 2.

he exposed the falsity of many an old supersitition; even the quaint popular ideas regarding the anatomy of the elephant and the dead kingfisher's habits had to go. In religion, however, Browne loved to lose himself in an "O altitudo," firmly insisting that "this is no vulgar part of Faith, to believe a thing not only above but contrary to Reason, and against the Arguments of our proper Senses." Confident that "there be not impossibilities enough in Religion for an active faith," he taught, as he quaintly says, his "haggard and unreclaimed Reason to stoop unto the lure of Faith," and regretted only that he had not lived before Christ's coming, with the Jews "who upon obscure prophesies and mystical types could raise a belief, and expect apparent impossibilities." [60]

Much the same was the mental attitude of John Norris. Trained as he was in metaphysics and the learning of the schools, he would be the last to condemn knowledge. Norris simply felt, as Sir Thomas Browne felt, that the mind is limited in its reach and fails to grasp the truth or even use sound laws of reason. The most that Norris can admit is:

> Or grant some knowledge dwells below,
> 'Tis but for some few years to stay
> Till I'm set loose from this dark house of clay,
> And in an instant I shall all things know.[61]

In this fashion the sacred poets of the seventeenth century, from pedestrian Quarles to the spiritual Crashaw and Vaughan, set the bounds of human knowledge. In the words of Quarles,

> True, Faith and Reason are the Soule's two Eyes:
> Faith evermore lookes upward, and discryes
> Objects remote; but Reason can discover
> Things onely neere; sees nothing that's above her.[62]

Nevertheless, this craving to know more of life than experience can teach is natural in man. Hence the mystic is concerned not simply with this one great problem, the search for God, but must face another, also, the question of the validity of earthly knowledge. One is a religious problem; the other is epistemological.

In general, however, English poets have slighted this second

[60] *Religio Medici*, l. 9.

[61] See above, p. 186, and *Curiosity* and *Against Knowledge*.

[62] *On Faith and Reason*. See also *On Raymond Sebund*.

problem that concerns the source and validity of knowledge and have turned their attention to the religious problem, the search for God. Apparently, most of them have taken it for granted that the surest way to divine truth is through secret spiritual channels. Or, if proof be desired, man's instincts suffice to establish the reality of the spirit's power. This is Drummond's argument:

> Why did wee get this high and vaste Desire,
> Vnto immortal things still to aspire?
> Why doth our Minde extend it beyond Time,
> And to that highest Happinesse euen clime?
> If wee be nought but what to Sense wee seeme." [63]

Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke, reasoned coldly in the same way:

> For Knowledge is of Power's eternity,
> And perfect Glory, the true image-taker;
> So as what doth the infinite containe
> Must be as infinite as it againe.[64]

To this one might add these lines from Sir John Davies' poem on immortality:

> So when we God and Angels do conceive,
> And think of truth, which is eternal too;
> Then do our Minds immortal Forms receive,
> Which if they mortal were, they could not do.[65]

The argument was so common that even a person so unmystical as Lord Herbert advanced it. "Since my coming into this world," he noted in his autobiography, "my soul hath formed or produced certain faculties which are almost as useless for this life as the above named senses were for the mother's womb." His conclusion is that "the proper objects of these faculties, therefore, though framed, or at least appearing in this world, is God only." [66]

Such thinkers accepted without solution, or even failed to see, the epistemological problem confronting mysticism, and turned to a search for God. To express concretely this search, they used commonly one of three symbols, speaking of a journey whose end is the beatific vision, or of a burning love between the individual

[63] "*It Autumn Was.*"
[64] *Of Humane Learning*, 3.
[65] *Nosce Teipsum*, ed. 1733, p. 80.
[66] Pp. 21-22. See too, above, p. 182.

and God, or of an inward, spiritual change that discloses the end sought in one's own heart.[67]

The symbol of love was employed most powerfully in the nineteenth century by Francis Thompson in *The Hound of Heaven* and by Coventry Patmore in the *Odes*. Protestant poets of the seventeenth century adopted the imagery of love less frequently, for they, like their followers, have found it repellant. Nevertheless, Francis Quarles in his many emblems based on portions of the *Canticles* did not shrink from this symbolism. One beautiful poem, for example, expands on the text, "My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lillies." But this piece is exceptional for its chastened use of this questionable imagery, and elsewhere the poet oversteps the bounds of good taste. Two early Catholic writers, furthermore, made use of this symbol without hesitancy.

> Love, thou art Absolute sole Lord
> Of Life and Death,

Crashaw exclaims at the opening of possibily his finest poem. In another he offers himself this consolation:

> Dear Soul, be strong!
> Mercy will come e're long
> And bring his bosome fraught with blessings,
> Flowers of never-fading graces
> To make immortall dressings
> For worthy soules, whose wise embraces
> Store up themselves for Him, Who is alone
> The Spouse of virgins and the virgin's Son.[68]

With the same kind of symbolism Southwell likens Christ's eyes to sweet volumes, nectared ambrys, soul-feeding meats, and quivers of love-darts.[69] To the ordinary reader such language is repulsive, even though the poet's justification is *The Song of Songs,* and Protestant writers as a rule avoided it.[70]

The second symbol, a journey from this life to another, was more common in the true literature of the time. Yet even this occurs more frequently in the widely read books of piety that hardly belong to *belles lettres* at all. In these books the figure of a journey would be used because it finds justification in many

[67] E. Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 153.

[68] *Prayer.* [69] *St. Peter's Complaint.*

[70] Reference, though, should be made to the work of Christopher Harvey.

Biblical phrases, and because of its nearness to daily life. Hence one finds titles like these: The *Scala Perfectionis, The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven,* which was especially dear to Bunyan, *The Pilgrimage of Man, the Pilgrimage to Paradise,* and *The Way to the Celestial Paradise.* Infinitely higher in literary value than these forgotten books of piety is George Herbert's *The Pilgrimage.* The poet travels toward the distant hill, "where lay my expectation," past "the gloomy cave of Desperation," past "phansie's medow," "care's cops," and "the wilde of passion." He finds on the hill, when he has scaled it, nought but "a lake of brackish waters," and realises that only death can bring him to his goal. But even this poem is dwarfed in significance before the greatest exemplar of the type, *Pilgrim's Progress.* In Bunyan's story the reader follows the steps of Christian from the City of Destruction to the City of Zion, as he passes by the brick walls and hedges along the way, toils laboriously through the sloughs, catches glimpses of distant hills or valleys, and steps aside over stiles into bypaths. These are the highways and the lanes of Puritan England, which are used to symbolize the experiences of a Christian along the pathway of life. At the end, the glorious vision of the Holy City appears, which brought true satisfaction to the mystic's desires.

Less literally than Bunyan the poets utilized the symbol of a journey. In one sense, God and the ideal world may be remote; but in another sense they are very near; for in our own hearts are found the movings of the divine spirit, and in nature, the surest glimpses of the other world.

> In us, not of us, a spirit not of Earth,
> Fashioning the mortall to immortal birth,

wrote Fulke Greville.[71] And of the world he lived in John Norris said:

> The sweets of Nature shall not stay
> My soul, but only shew to thee the way;
> To thee! Thou beauty's great original.[72]

This union of the divine and the human, of the remote with the near, was made easy for the Christian through the intermediary offices held by Christ and the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, God

[71] *Of Religion,* 3. [72] *The Invitation.*

seemed to these poets very near, immanent both in the human heart and in nature, so that only a spiritual change need be effected to reveal him here. Therefore, the symbol of a journey is often combined with the third mystical symbol, that of growth or transfiguration.

Such a combination is often found in the poems of Henry Vaughan; for no one had a greater fervor than he to seek God or a keener realization of the divine in ordinary life. *The Search,* whose very title is significant in this connection, begins:

> 'Tis now cleare day: I see a Rose
> Bud in the bright East, and disclose
> The Pilgrim-Sunne; all night have I
> Spent in a roving Extasie
> To find my Saviour.

In this spirit he searches, but in vain, for God. Then the inner voice of the mystics speaks to him:

> Leave, leave thy gadding thoughts;
> Who Pores
> And spies
> Still out of Doores
> descries
> Within them nought.

The only obvious conclusion is that God must be found here if at all. Nevertheless, the poem ends unexpectedly:

> Search well another world; who studies this,
> Travels in Clouds, seeks Manna, where none is.

This idea, so frequently recurring in Vaughan's poetry, is finely expressed in the words, "run on, and reach home with the light." If this seems to be an implicit acceptance of the symbol of a journey, another memorable phrase, "fill thy brest with home." suggests instead that only a spiritual transformation, and no long search, is necessary to restore the innocence of the first creation, when

> Angels lay Leiger here; Each Bush and Cel,
> Each Oke and high-way knew them.[13]

This belief in the immanence of God can be traced alike to the New Testament and to Neo-Platonism. From the sixth *Ennead* of

[13] *Corruption,* p. 440. See too, Herbert's *Miserie,* and Joseph's Beaumont's *The Pilgrim* and *House and Home.*

Plotinus came such thoughts as these: "God is not external to any one, but is present in all things, though they are ignorant that he is so;" "God is not in a certain place, but wherever anything is able to come into contact with him there he is present;" and, "a soul that knows itself must know that the proper direction of its energy is not outwards in a straight line, but round a center which is within it." Yet it was less easy for Plotinus than for the Christian, with his faith in the doctrine of the Trinity, to bring heaven to earth, and all through our sacred literature there appears this belief that God may be found in our own hearts.

In this sense the title of Christopher Harvey's volume, *The School of the Heart,* is to be understood. One of the lyrics of his earlier collection, *The Synagogue,* begins,

> Life is a journey. From our mothers' wombs,
> As houses, we set out; and in our tombs,
> As inns we rest, till it be time to rise."[14]

But the later poems lay emphasis on spiritual culture, rather than a change of abode. Speaking of the heart, the poet says:

> Thou, Thou canst soften,
> Lighten, enliven, purifie, restore,
> And make more fruitfull then it was before
> Its hardnesse, darkenesse, death, uncleannesse, losse,
> And barrenesse; refine it from the drosse,
> And draw out all the dregs; heal ev'ry sore;
> Teach it to know it selfe, and love Thee more.

Hence the poems that follow this introduction are filled with thoughts familiar to the mystics, and, although Harvey seldom rises higher than the position he modestly claimed for himself as the disciple of George Herbert and Quarles, much in his poetry is truly significant.

> My worldly bus'nesse shall be still,
> That heav'nly thoughts my mind may fill,

he resolves, admitting

> Of itself mine heart is dark;
> But Thy fire, by shining bright,
> Fills it full of saving light.

To this inspiration he therefore would trust and would have reason

---

[14] *The Journey.*

"her scepter quite resign." Possibly the keynote of all these lyrics is nothing more than these time-worn sentiments:

> Move me no more, mad world, it is in vaine,

and

> Why should I not ascend,
> And climbe up where I may mend
> My meane estate of misery?[75]

A love for nature and a feeling of kinship with all its parts were consequently natural to the mystics. With all of Wordsworth's sympathy, Crashaw mentioned the rose, the violet, and "the poor panting turtle-dove." Yet his all-absorbing religious passion raised his thoughts as a rule above such things. John Norris, also, although he saw in nature one of the most direct manifestations of God, was too intellectual to be engrossed in it. The majority of poets, however, remained satisfied with such revelations of God as natural objects have to offer. "Indeed what are the Heavens, the earth, nay, every creature but Hieroglyphics and Emblems of his glory?"[76] This question from Quarles surprises the reader more than it would have done from John Smith, with his finer temperament. Smith seems but to express himself in saying:

> God made the universe and all the creatures contained therein as so many glasses wherein He might reflect his glory. He hath copied forth Himself in the creation; and in this outward world we may read the lovely characters of the Divine goodness, power, and wisdom . . . Thus may a man walk up and down the world as in a garden of spices, and suck a Divine sweetness out of every flower. . . . True religion never finds itself out of the infinite sphere of the Divinity.[77]

Thus in general the mystical poets were content to read God in nature and the human heart. Like Plato, they would enjoy the beauties of this world, as a means of apprehending the greater radiance of another. And with Coventry Patmore, they would say:

> The much abused earth is the "main region" of the Poet and not the inscrutable heavens, though unless his eye be habitually turned to those heavens, the earth remains as inscrutable as themselves.[78]

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[75] See pp. 109, 192, 203, 207, 220 and 205 of Grosart's edition.

[76] *Emblems*, "To the Reader."

[77] W. R. Inge, *Christian Mysticism*, pp. 295-296.

[78] Basil Champney, *Coventry Patmore*, 1, p. 258. This passage, also, from

Vaughan was the greatest of the nature mystics of the seventeenth century. Dawn, "with its all-surprising light," sober evening, the "unthrift Sun," the azure heavens, the fountains and banks of flowers, "some fast asleep, others broad-eyed," the oaks and gilded clouds and God's "host of spyes," the stars, all these spoke to Vaughan the deepest truths. Together they offered one grand symphony of praise;

> In what Rings,
> And Hymning Circulations the quick world
> Awakes, and sings!
> The rising winds,
> And falling springs,
> Birds, beasts, all things
> Adore him in their kinds."[11]

Nature, therefore, had lessons for him as it had for Wordsworth. This power is recognized in *The Tempest:*

> O that man could do so! that he would hear
> The world read to him! all the vast expence
> In the Creation shed, and slav'd to sence
> Makes up but lectures for his eie, and ear.
>
> Sure, mighty love, foreseeing the discent
> Of this poor Creature, by a gracious art
> Hid in these low things snares to gain his heart,
> And laid surprizes in each Element.
>
> All things here shew him heaven; Waters that fall,
> Chide, and fly up; Mists of corruptest fome
> Quit their first beds & mount; trees, herbs, flowres, all
> Strive upwards stil, and point him the way home.

Firmly convinced of the potent spirituality of all nature, Vaughan at times is seized with a longing like Shelley's in the *West Wind,* and exclaims:

one of Norris's *Practical Discourses*, ed. 1707, p. 203, might be quoted: God speaks to man "within, and he speaks to him without: Within by the Dictates of Reason, by the Light of inward Truth, and by the secret whispers of his spirit: Without, by the visible Frame and Order of the Creation, wherein not only the Heavens declare the Glory of God, and the Firmament shews his Handy-Work, but even the meanest Insect reads him a Lecture of Divinity, and Preaches to him a Sermon of Adoration and Devotion."

[11] *The Morning Watch*, p. 424.

I would I were some Bird, or Star,
Flutt'ring in woods, or lifted far
Above this Inne
And Rode of sin!
Then either Star, or Bird, should be
Shining or singing still to thee.[80]

At other times he felt, like Arnold, Nature's calming power:

I would (said I) my God would give
The staidness of these things to man! for these
To his divine appointments ever cleave,
And no new business breaks their peace.[81]

The world, as Vaughan read it, was both his solace and his inspiration.

As Henry Vaughan found God everywhere in Nature, so his great fellow mystic, Thomas Traherne, found the divine by introversion in the human heart. In passing into his consciousness, nature seemed to resolve itself into something purely unsubstantial, and he saw the world with inward eyes. More implicitly than any of his fellow poets, this quiet, ascetic churchman followed the prescription of Hugo of St. Victor: "The way to ascend to God is to descend into oneself." [82]

The peculiar trend of Traherne's mind, then, was for introspection. No other poet felt as strongly as he the preëminence of the spirit; indeed, for him, spirit was altogether disassociated from body. The soul is in the body, for the time being, but not confined within its narrow walls; it "is a sphere not shut up here, but everywhere." So his mind ranges where it will. In thought all times are present and all places near to him; for "thoughts are always free." They are the bond between man and God; and, since "by thoughts alone the soul is made divine," the mind "is the only being that doth live." [83]

Traherne carried this trust in the supremacy of the spirit so far that he denied the reality of the objective world as plainly as Berkeley or any of the later idealists. No other implication can be assigned to this stanza from *My Spirit:*

[80] *Christ's Nativity*, p. 442.

[81] *Man*, p. 477. See above, pp. 190-191.

[82] W. R. Inge, *Christian Mysticism*, p. 141. Cf. Joseph Beaumont's beautiful lyric, *House and Home*.

[83] *My Spirit*, p. 42, and *Thoughts*, pp. 107, 115.

This made me present evermore
With whatsoe'er I saw.
An object, if it were before
My eye, was by Dame Nature's law,
Within my soul. Her store
Was all at once within me; all Her treasures
Were my immediate and internal pleasures,
Substantial joys, which did inform my mind.
With all she wrought
My soul was fraught,
And every object in my heart a thought
Begot, or was; I could not tell,
Whether the things did there
Themselves appear,
Which in my Spirit truly seem'd to dwell;
Or whether my conforming mind
Were not even all that therein shin'd.

One need not wonder, therefore, at the unreality of Traherne's pictures of the material world. It existed for him subjectively, not objectively, and it was interesting and significant not in itself, but as a symbol or revelation of something higher. This was the view of Coleridge and the German Transcendentalists, who doubtless would gladly subscribe to Traherne's belief that

All objects are
Alive in Thee! supersubstantial, rare,
Above themselves, and nigh of kin
To those pure things we find
In His great mind
Who made the world!

The result of this absorption in the life of the spirit was an extremely self-centered religion. In his regard, the world was created expressly for him;

Long time before
I in my mother's womb was born,
A God preparing did this glorious store,
The world for me adorn.[84]

God, indeed, showed his highest power and wisdom not so much in creating the world as in bringing it to Traherne to enjoy; for

Neither goodness, wisdom, power, nor love,
Nor happiness itself in things could be,

[84] *The Salutation*, p. 3.

Did they not all in one fair order move
And jointly by their service end in me:
Had He not made an eye to be the Sphere
Of all things, none of these would e'er appear.[58]

From this reasoning the only rational deduction is that which Hegel later made, that God was only perfected in the creation. Nor did Traherne, like Drummond, shrink from this assumption.

And what than this can be more plain and clear?
What truth than this more evident appear?
The Godhead cannot prize
The sun at all, nor yet the skies,
Or air, or earth, or trees, or seas,
Or stars, unless the soul of man they please.[59]
No joy, no, nor Perfection to thee came
By the contriving of this World's great Frame.

And with even greater daring in *The Recovery* Traherne declares, "In us He reigns."

A second outcome of this mental attitude was the trust placed by Traherne in contemplation. Even in childhood he had proved its fruitfulness, when

A meditating, inward eye
Gazing at quiet did within me lie,
And every thing
Delighted me that was their heavenly King.[60]

Dumbness has the same story to record:

Sure Man was born to meditate on things,
And to contemplate the eternal springs
Of God and Nature, glory, bliss, and pleasure;
That life and love might be his Heavenly treasure;
And therefore speechless made at first, that He
Might in himself profoundly busied be.

Nor would Traherne limit the fruitfulness of quiet thought to childhood; for he felt assured that

[58] *The Improvement*, p. 26.

[59] *The Demonstration*, p. 85. Cf. Master Eckhard: "God without them (the creatures) would not be God." Light, Life, and Love, pp. xx-xxii. Drummond's *Hymn to the Fairest Fair* expresses the other view:

[60] *The Preparative*, p. 16.

A man that seemeth idle to the view
Of others, may the greatest business do,

and that

A quiet silent person may possess
All that is great or high in Blessedness.
The inward work is the supreme.[88]

How similar this is to the thought of *Expostulation and Reply.* But Traherne's poems lack the touch of reality that Wordsworth's possess. Even if we could unite Vaughan with Traherne we should not have the full counterpart of the poet who combined in so high a degree both realism and idealism.

If one may judge from his own testimony, Traherne at least occasionally lost himself completely in the mystic's reverie that Wordsworth describes in *Tintern Abbey:*

That serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,—
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul.

To such a state as this Traherne refers in *Meditations.* "Sometimes," he says, "I should be alone, and without employment, when suddenly my Soul would return to itself, and forgetting all things in the whole world which mine eyes had seen, would be carried away to the ends of the earth." [89] At such times, truths were apprehended that are ordinarily lost to consciousness or only imperfectly conceived. Of the certainty of such intuitive knowledge he speaks in *Demonstration:*

The highest things are easiest to be shewn,
And only capable of being known.
A mist involves the eye
While in the middle it doth live;
And till the ends of things are seen
The way's uncertain that doth stand between.
As in the air we see the clouds
Like winding sheets or shrouds,
Which, though they nearer are, obscure
The sun, which, higher far, is far more pure.

[88] *Silence,* p. 38.

[89] *Meditations,* 3. 17.

More plainly in Traherne and Vaughan than in other poets, one finds the conviction that man is but a portion of the divine, and that God is very near. Pietistic writers might describe life as a journey toward a distant goal; but poets saw God in nature and the human heart. Traherne, for example, asked in *Amendment:*

> Am I a glorious spring
> Of joys and riches to my King?
> Are men made Gods? And may they see
> So wonderful a thing
> As God in me?
> And is my soul a mirror that must shine
> Even like the sun and be far more divine?

By the poets under consideration no idea is given of the slow and painful progress by which the mystic achieved his vision of the divine. Most of them rest satisfied with this divinely illumined world of self and seldom press on to a more complete sight of God. Dante's dearly bought consciousness of the nature of sin, his slow and toilsome regeneration, his radiant vision of God, altogether transcended the powers of other poets. The less literary mystics make a good deal of the slow growth to the achievement of their life's purpose, the vision of God. Dean Inge has divided their progress into these three stages: the purgative life; the illuminative life, when all our faculties, will, intellect, and feeling, are concentrated on God; and the intuitive life, whose motive force is contemplation.[90] Delacroix marks this fourfold division: a period of unrest; a period, begun abruptly, in which vision succeeds passivity; a period of sadness and depression; and, finally, a state of permanent peace and quiet.[91] And Miss Underhill traces the mystic's growth more technically through the awakening of self, the purgation, and the illumination of self, to the soul's dark night and the final unitive experience that brings not simply a sight of God but the closest identification with him.[92]

Of the slow and laborious progress along the mystic way, John Bunyan has left two interesting records. His personal experience, given in *Grace Abounding,* can be broken into the four stages marked out by Delacroix. He was troubled grievously at first with

[90] *Christian Mysticism,* p. 10.
[91] *Études d'histoire et de psychologie du Mysticisme,* p. 346.
[92] *Mysticism,* pp. 205 ff.

the consciousness of his sins. "These things, I say, when I was but a child, but nine or ten years old, did so distress my Soul, that there in the midst of my many Sports and Childish Vanities, amidst my vain Companions, I was often much cast down and afflicted in my Mind therewith, yet could I not let go my sins." Then came the sudden awakening on the village green, when the voice from heaven asked, "Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to Heaven, or have thy sins and go to Hell?" Depressing doubts, though, soon followed this conversion. He could not abandon bell-ringing and other favorite sports. His conversation was still so profane that an old woman of Bedford openly reproved him "as the ungodliest fellow for swearing that ever she heard in all her Life." And finally the dream on the hillside showed him his pitiable condition and left him with "a vehement hunger and desire to be one of that number that did sit in the Sunshine." Such depression has always been a part of the mystic's progress. But the final step, the permanent peace and quiet that at last were won, is but scantily represented in *Grace Abounding,* though at the end the penitent's morbid fears were sloughed off, "Darkness and Atheism fled away, and the blessed things of Heaven were set within my view."

In *Pilgrim's Progress* the same story is told with less morbid fear and with heightened imagination. The journey for poor Christian from the City of Destruction to the City of Zion is still long and wearisome. The difficulties and dangers encountered by the wayfarer are frightful; despair torments him. Nevertheless, in the end he reaches Beulah land, and, beyond the river Jordan, sees the shining eternal city.

It is almost impossible elsewhere in the literature of the seventeenth century to find so complete a record of the mystic way. The poets confined themselves to one or more single themes, or, writing in response to certain moods, made no attempt to trace their spiritual growth continuously. The mysticism of these poets, therefore, can best be studied as they reflect certain common moods. And if these moods are more or less prominent in all religious feeling, one is simply reminded again that mysticism is not altogether distinct from other forms of Christian faith, and that many of its fundamental teachings are as old as Philo and the Alexandrine Platonists.

Among the English mystics the sense that "the world is too

much with us" was especially strong. John Norris, the "Recluse of Bemerton," lived his secluded life, as Ferrar did, through choice, and rejoiced in "the happy change"; for

> Tho my fleeting life runs swiftly on,
> 'Twill not be short, because 'tis all my own.[93]

All that is said in his poetry for retirement is repeated in his essay *Of Solitude,* a piece of almost Augustan prose that ends with the thought: "I find I must take refuge at my Study at last, and there redeem the time that I have lost among the Learned." Vaughan had the same love for seclusion. He gives this counsel in *Retirement:*

> If then thou wouldst unto my seat,
> 'Tis not th' applause, and feat
> Of dust, and clay
> Leads to that way,
> But from those follies a resolv'd Retreat.

Many of Traherne's poems, also, some of which have been already noticed, recognize the need for solitude. The child is born speechless, he says, "that he might in himself profoundly busied be." Later, amid the distractions of life, these first divinely learned truths are forgotten. But man's happiness, as all mystics would agree, depends on his return, in seclusion from the world, to this state of childish receptivity.

Such retirement involves also abnegation. Mystical writers had long stressed this as one of the fundamental virtues. The teachings of Thomas à Kempis, the counsel of the *Theologia Germanica,* and the wise advice of St. John of the Cross on the right and wrong use of the pleasures of life, were taken to heart by the poets. Our earthly desires, St. John showed, mean privation of the spirit of God, fatigue, torture, darkness, and weakness of soul. "When our affections," he said, "free from the influence of natural goods, which are deceitful, rest upon no one, the soul is free to love all men reasonably and spiritually, as God wills them to be loved." The doctrine was taken over by the English mystics. It is stressed especially in the last two books of More's *Psychozoia,* as its author had learned it in the *Theologia Germanica.* Habington, also, accepts it, in passages like these:

[93] *Retirement.*

What interest doth all the vaine
Cunning of surfet to your sences gaine;
Since it obscure the spirit must,
And bow the flesh to sleepe, disease or lust?

And again,

The soule which doth with God unite,
Those gayities how doth she slight
Which ore opinions sway! [94]

There comes into English verse, then, with these mystics the note of calm and quiet. The bitter arguments of the theologians and the harsh discords of civil war sound very remote, or are not heard at all. Instead of these earthly things, Norris says:

A nobler, a diviner guest,
Has took possession of my breast;
He has, and must engross it all,
And yet the room is much too small.

Vaughan again and again struck the same note. In *Retirement,* for example, he calls:

Fresh fields and woods; the Earth's fair face!
God's foot-stool! and mans dwelling place!
I ask not why the first Believer
Did love to be a Country liver,
Who to secure pious content
Did pitch by groves and wells his tent;
Where he might view the boundless skie,
And all those glorious lights on high;
With flying meteors, mists, and show'rs,
Subjected hills, trees, meads, and flow'rs,
And ev'ry minute bless the King,
And wise creatour of each thing?

Sure in their belief that only the things of the spirit count, the mystics are invariably optimists. A temperament that feels the richness of retirement and abnegation and religious calm is naturally optimistic. Mysticism has even come dangerously near to breaking down distinctions between right and wrong. Meister Eckhart had taught that "Evil, from the highest standpoint, is only a means for realizing the eternal aim of God in creation." [95] Evil, therefore, which must be a part of God's plan, ceases to be

[94] *Et Alta a Longe Cognoscit, Deus, Deus Meus,* and *Cupio Dissolvi.*
[95] W. R. Inge, *Light, Life, and Love,* p. xxix.

evil. Augustine in the *Confessions* took this view, which was repeated again and again, in philosophy and in literature. Traherne in one of the *Meditations* asserts that "everything in its place is admirable, deep, and glorious; out of its place like a wandering bird, is desolate and good for nothing." [96] The poets seldom followed this argument, to its logical conclusion. Like Vaughan, they took the evil with the good and felt the blessedness of life even in its discipline. Vaughan means no more than this in his *Affliction:*

> Sickness is wholsome, and Crosses are but curbs
> To check the mule, unruly man;
> They are heaven's husbandry, the famous fan
> Purging the floor which Chaff disturbs.
> Were all the year one constant Sun-shine, wee
> Should have now flowres,
> All would be drought and leanness; not a tree
> Would make us bowres.

Traherne, however, had more of Emerson's blindness to the stern realities of life; to him

> Even trades themselves seen in celestial light,
> And cares and sins and woes are bright.

And the lesson that the purple mountain and the ancient wood spoke to the New England philosopher is recognized in Traherne's poem, *The Anticipation:*

> Wants are the fountains of Felicity;
> No joy could ever be
> Were there no want. No bliss,
> No sweetness perfect were it not for this.
> Want is the greatest pleasure
> Because it makes all treasure.
> O what a wonderful profound abyss
> Is God! In whom eternal wants and treasures
> Are more delightful, since they both are pleasures.[97]

In this attitude Traherne seems to be either utterly unsympathetic or blind to suffering. But when he declared,

> All may happy be, each one most blest,
> Both in himself and others,[98]

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[96] 3. 55. See too *Religio Medici*, I. 16, 53.

[97] *The Vision* and *Anticipation.*

[98] *Ease*, p. 56.

he means that spiritual blessings are offered to all. This is made plain by a poem called *The Choice:*

> Eternity doth give the richest things
> To every man, and makes all Kings.
> The best and richest things it doth convey
> To all and every one,
> It raised me unto a throne!
> Which I enjoy,
> In such a way,
> That truth her daughter is my chiefest bride,
> Her daughter truth's my chiefest pride.

In this sense, "the best things should be the most common," as Traherne insists they are.[99]

Of the English poets who thus recommended a life of calm and quiet as the surest means of knowing God, few attained what is technically called the state of contemplation. Of this psychic condition Richard of St. Victor distinguished three types or grades: *mentis dilatio,* or the enhancement of normal spiritual vision; *mentis sublevatio,* in which the vision rises above all human power; and *mentis alienatio,* when self-consciousness is lost in ecstacy. Only this last type is for the mystic true contemplation.[100] Ruysbrock described it in this way: "From the splendour of the Father a direct light shines on those spirits in which the thought is naked and free from similitudes, raised above the senses, above similitudes, above reason and without reason, in the lofty purity of the spirit.[101] To this may be added the idea of Jacob Boehme: "Son, when thou canst throw thyself into That, where no creature dwelleth, though it be but for a moment, then thou hearest what God speaketh," and "If thou canst, my son, for a while but cease from all thy thinking and willing, then thou shalt hear the unspeakable words of God." In such a state "the simple eye of the soul itself remains open—that is thought, pure, naked, uniform, and raised above the understanding."[102] Such is "the negative road," as mystics call it, to the divine.

For this extreme sort of contemplation, the *mentis alienatio,* English poets had but slight regard. Against it the practical

[99] *Meditations,* 3. 53. [100] *Cell of Self Knowledge.*

[101] M. Maeterlinck, *Ruysbroeck and the Mystics,* p. 39.

[102] *Of the Supersensual Life,* Everyman ed., p. 227, and Ludovic Rosius, quoted from R. A. Vaughan, 1, p. 25.

English temper spoke in these plain words of Frances Quarles: "Let not the sweetness of Contemplation be so esteem'd, that Action be despis'd; Rachel was more faire, Leah more fruitfull: As contemplation is more delightfull, so is it more dangerous: Lot was upright in the City, and wicked in the Mountaine." [103] Nor had these English mystics often reached this state of contemplation. Richard Baxter, who certainly led the active life that Quarles enjoined, might recommend contemplation to his parishioners: "Get thy heart," he urged, "as clear from the world as thou canst; wholly lay by the thoughts of thy business, of thy troubles, of thy enjoyments, and of everything that may take up any room in thy soul." But he was forced to make this admission, "alas, how little know I of that whereof I am about to speak," and really he meant to recommend no such extreme contemplation as the true mystic craves.[104]

Besides Traherne, Henry More and the recluse of Bemerton were possibly the only poets who approached closely to this state of mind. "The soul," Norris realized, "may be wound up to a most strange degree of Abstraction by the silent and steady Contemplation of God. . . . Some of the severer Platonists have been of Opinion, that 'tis possible for a Man by mere intention of thought not only to withdraw the Soul from all commerce with the Senses, but even really to separate it from the Body. . . . There are exceeding great Measures of Abstraction in Contemplation, so great, that sometimes whether a Man be in the Body or out of the Body, he himself can hardly tell.[105] How closely Norris reached this condition himself, or whether he classed himself with the "severer Platonists," one can only surmise. It may be that *The Return* is based on a personal experience:

> Dear Contemplation, my divinest joy,
> When I thy sacred mount ascend
> What heavenly sweets my soul employ!
> Why can't I there my days for ever spend?
> When I have conquer'd thy steep heights with pain
> What pity 'tis that I must down again!

But at the end the poet swings back to the more practical views of Quarles and Baxter:

[103] *Enchyridion*, 4. 12. [104] *Saints' Rest*, pt. 4. 6, 9; 1. 4, 1.
[105] *An Idea of Happiness*. In *A Collection of Miscellanies*, ed. 1687, pp. 422-423. See too *Elevation*.

No, here I must not think to dwell,
But mind the duties of my proper sphere.
So angels, tho they heaven's glories know,
Forget not to attend their charge below.

Jeremy Taylor, also, expressed the same conservative point of view.[106] "There is a degree of meditation so exalted," he admits, "that it changes the very name, and is called contemplation; and it is the unitive way of religion, that is, it consists in unions and adherences to God." Taylor feels, however, that such rapture is often due to a psychopathic condition, and "that many illusions have come in the likeness of visions, and absurd fancies under the pretence of raptures." Far better, he feels, it is to "entertain the inward man . . . in actions of repentence, virtue, and precise duty." But few true mystics would accept as apt the analogy that Taylor uses: "It is more healthful and nutritive to dig the earth, and to eat of her fruits, than to stare upon the greatest glories of the heavens: So unsatisfying a thing is rapture and transportation to the soul; it often distracts the faculties, but seldom does advantage piety, and is full of danger in the greatest of its lustre."

The preparative of the mystic for contemplation, it has been seen, was the conscious removal of the mind from all things temporal and spacial, the going forth of the soul "beyond the limits of nature and of reason" to ascent on the "divine ladder of faith." The condition has already been described.[107] "He who penetrates into himself, transcends himself, ascends truly to God."

Frances Quarles, who would be hardly able to lose himself in any form of abstraction, gives this precise description of such "noughting of self":

When thy ambitious knowledge wold attempt
So high a Taske as God, she must exempt
All carnall sense; Thy Reason must release
Her pow'r; Thy Fancy must be bound to th' peace;
Thy Spirits must be rapt; They must exile
Thy flesh, and keepe a Sabbath for a while;
Thou must forget thy selfe, and take strong Bands
Of thy owne Thoughts, and shake eternall hands

[106] *The Life of our Blessed Lord*, Pt. I, sect. 5, disc. 3. "Of Meditation," pp. 116-121.

[107] See also St. John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, pp. 64, 74, and Inge's quotation from Albertus Magnus, *Christian Mysticism*, p. 145.

With thy rebellious Lusts; discard and cleare
Thy heart of all Ideas.[108]

To this conclusion the mystics were brought by their sense of the infiniteness of Deity. In that mood John Norris, for example, opens his *Divine Hymn:*

No power can justly praise Him but must be
As great, as infinite as He;
He comprehends His boundless Self alone,
Created minds too shallow are and dim,
His works to fathom, much more Him.

Hence the one way to God seemed to be the complete loss of sense and reason.

Another religious experience that is described again and again by these literary mystics is the sense of the darkness impeding human sight as it seeks the divine. The "dark night of the soul" immediately preceding the final triumph has proved the most tragic step in the mystic's quest. Henry Vaughan, who spoke so often of radiant light and whose favorite word was *bright* or *white,* said finely

There is in God, some say
A deep, but dazzling darkness.[109]

Drummond, likewise, admitted that God can be seen only as the dark mists for a moment break away. All readers of poetry are familiar with Francis Thompson's splendid vision:

I dimly guess what Time in mists confounds;
Yet ever and anon a trumpet sounds
From the hid battlements of Eternity;
These shaken mists a space unsettle, then
Round the half-glimpsed turrets slowly wash again.

Long before the modern Catholic poet won this moment's joy, Henry Drummond had experienced it;

Beneath a sable vaile, and Shadowes deepe,
Of Vnaccessible and dimming light,
In Silence ebane Clouds more blacke than Night,
The Worlds great King his secrets hidde doth keepe:
Through those Thicke Mistes when any Mortall Wight

---

[108] *On our Meditation upon God.* See also *Enchyridion,* 2. 30.
[109] *The Night,* p. 523.

Aspires, with halting pace, and Eyes that weepe,
To pore, and in his Misteries to creepe,
With Thunders hee and Lightnings blastes their Sight.[110]

But the poets speak more often of the direct intuition that they have had of divine truth. No one of them achieved the supernatural vision described vividly by Dante in the closing cantos of the *Paradiso;* for most of these poets saw no further than this material world and our human nature illumined by a divine light. Of their many references to the less abnormal glimpse of the divine, only two can be given here, one the vision of a Catholic poet, the other of a Protestant.

In one of the most mystical of Crashaw's poems, *In the Glorious Epiphanie of our Lord God,* the three kings unite in their song of adoration. Their chief argument is that the bright sun and the old pagan idols have been shorn of their glory by the coming of Christ. The idea is worked out in part with Crashaw's customary fantasticality;

Neuer more
By wanton heyfer shall be worn
A garland, or a guilded horn:
The altar-stall'd ox, fatt Osyris now
With his fair sister cow
Shall kick the clouds no more; but lean and tame,
See His horn'd face, and dy for shame:
And Mithra now shall be no name.

The remainder of the poem, however, is more truly mystical. The three kings look forward in time past the first dimming of the sun, at the Crucifixion, to the second, at the conversion of Saul. By this eclipse Crashaw says, the indirect, or "oblique," source of light was shut off, and Saul, "the right-ey'd Areopagite," was able by "vigorous guess"—that is the mystic's intuition—to "inuade and catch Thy quick reflex." The vision came with "swift flash," and Saul was transformed to Paul, the first "great mystic of the mystic day." Thereafter, he taught the true path between this world and the other;

O prize of the rich Spirit! with what feirce chase
Of his strong soul, shall he
Leap at thy lofty face,

---

[110] *Mans Knowledge.* See Giles Fletcher's vision in the fourth canto of *Christ's Victory and Triumph.*

> And seize the swift flash, in rebound
> From this obsequious cloud,
> Once call'd a sun,
> Till dearly thus undone;
> Till thus triumphantly tam'd (O ye two
> Twinne sunnes!) and taught now to negotiate you.

The kings therefore resolve

> To make braue way
> Upwards, and presse on for the pure
> Intelligentiall prey,

or

> At least to play
> The amorous spyes
> And peep and proffer at Thy sparkling throne.

If one of Norris's poems were to be placed beside this, it would doubtless be *The Elevation*. "The general design of the precedent poem," he explains, "is to represent the gradual ascent of the soul by contemplation to the supreme good, together with its firm adherency to it, and its full acquiescence in it. . . . The inclinations of the animal nature have little or no power over him, who has advanc'd to the heights of habitual contemplation." The last two stanzas of the poem are:

> But see, to what new region am I come?
> I know it well, it is my native home.
> Here led I once a life divine,
> Which did all good, no evil know:
> Ah! who wou'd such sweet bliss resign
> For those vain shews which fools admire below?
> 'Tis true, but don't of folly past complain,
> But joy to see these blest abodes again.
>
> A good retrieve: but lo, while thus I speak,
> With piercing rays, th' eternal day does break,
> The beauties of the face divine,
> Strike strongly on my feeble sight:
> With what bright glories does it shine!
> 'Tis one immense and ever-flowing light.
> Stop here my soul; thou canst not bear more bliss,
> Nor can thy now rais'd palate ever relish less.

The fervor with which the mystics have described such moments of vision is proof of their sincerity. A single thought is enough to kindle their imaginations; or, as Crashaw felt,

I sing the name which none can say
But touch'd with an interior ray.[111]

But moments of vision like these were not usually of long duration. At the opening of the *Paradiso* Dante laments that human memory cannot retain, nor words reproduce, adequately the experience he has had. Henry Vaughan's vision proved to be just as fleeting:

But this near done,
That little light I had was gone.[113]

Or one may read the same confession of disappointment from John Norris:

When I have conquer'd thy steep heights with pain
What pity 'tis that I must down again.[112]

The marked difference, however, between these brief moments of vision and man's normal power of apprehension, was not understood by the mystics to imply that the spirit's life is not continuous and unbroken. Neither birth nor death, which pertain to the physical existence only, can affect it at all.

A belief in preëxistence was therefore natural to the mystics. Henry More gathered in *Præ-existency* the chief arguments that Neo-Platonists used in support of the belief. Drummond and Norris, and indeed most of the poets here considered, accept the idea. In the *Elevation* Norris calls to his spirit:

Take wing—my soul—and upwards bend thy flight,
To thy originary fields of light.

There he anticipates finding nothing strange:

But see, to what new region am I come?
I know it well, it is my native home.
Here led I once a life divine,
Which did all good, no evil know.

Of these seventeenth-century poets, Vaughan and Traherne were fondest of the idea. Vaughan's *Retreate* may have given to Wordsworth the fundamental idea of the *Ode:*

Happy those early dayes! when I
Shin'd in my Angell-infancy.
Before I understood this place

[111] *To the Name—Jesus.*
[112] *Contemplation.*
[113] *Vanity of Spirit.*

> Appointed for my second race,
> Or taught my soul to fancy ought
> But a white, Celestiall thought,
> When yet I had not walkt above
> A mile, or two, from my first love,
> And looking back (at that short space),
> Could see a glimpse of his bright-face
> When on some gilded cloud, or flowre
> My gazing soul would dwell an houre,
> And in those weaker glories spy
> Some shadows of eternity.

Just as thoroughly Wordsworthian, though, are these lines from *Man's Fall:*

> Besides I've lost
> A traine of lights, which in those Sunshine dayes
> Were my sure guides,

or these verses from *Corruption:*

> Sure, It was so, Man in those early days
> Was not all stone, and Earth,
> He shin'd a little, and by those weak Rays
> Had some glimpse of his birth.

Holding this belief Vaughan and especially Traherne saw a sanctity in childhood. Vaughan asks in one of his poems,

> Since all that age doth teach, is ill,
> Why should I not love childe-hood still?[114]

To this thought Traherne returns again and again. Childhood seemed to him full of such happy innocence as this:

> A learned and a happy ignorance
> Divided me
> From all the sloth, care, pain, and sorrow
> that advance
> The madness and the misery
> Of men. No error, no distraction I
> Saw soil the earth or overcloud the sky.

This comes about because God

> In our childhood with us walks
> And with our thoughts mysteriously he talks.

---

[114] *Childe-hood*, p. 521.

And like the later poet who addressed the child as "thou best Philosopher," "thou eye among the blind," and "mighty Prophet! seer blest!" Traherne would show us

> That Childhood might itself alone be said
> My tutor, teacher, guide to be,
> Instructed then even by the Deity,[115]

The same understanding of childhood is conveyed in Traherne's fine prose *Meditations.* "Those pure and virgin apprehensions I had in my infancy," he admits, "and that divine light wherewith I was born, are the best unto this day wherein I can see the universe." [116] Traherne's prose under the influence of a strong emotion becomes more harmonious than his verse in the two succeeding meditations that begin, "All appeared new and strange at first, inexpressibly rare and delightful, and beautiful," and "The corn was orient and immortal wheat." [117] Vaughan also, sensing the wonderment of the infant in its new surroundings, says, "Things here were strange unto him." But neither poet could do more in verse than Traherne in these deeply felt meditations to show the innocence and sacredness of Childhood.

Between birth and death, the other termination of our earthly life, intervenes our mortal existence. Commonplace enough it seems to ordinary men; but, in the eyes of the mystic, it, too, is a marvel. "We are that bold and adventurous piece of Nature," *The Religio Medici* reminds us; for Sir Thomas Browne conceived the universe as a "a Stair, or manifest scale of creatures, rising not disorderly, or in confusion, but with a comely method and proportion." Things like plants having mere existence, creatures with life and sense, mankind endowed with reasoning faculties, and the unseen spirits, those "tutelary and Guardian Angels," hovering about us—what a mystery is life! And in this world man lives as an "amphibious piece between a corporal and spiritual Essence, that middle form that links these two together." "The whole creation is a Mystery," the author concludes, "and particularly that of Man." [118]

Such a philosopher can hardly regard death as any essential change in our being, though he quaintly terms it "the mortal and

[115] *Eden*, p. 8, and the *Approach*, pp. 31, 33.
[116] *Meditations*, 3. 1.
[117] See above.
[118] *Religio Medici*, 1. 15, 34, 36.

right-lined circle" that "must conclude and shut up all." To him "man is a noble animal, splendid in ashes and pompous in the grave." [119] So the mystics in general have handled finely the thought of death. Sometimes John Norris sinks to extreme prosiness; but two poems on this theme are as fine, in some phrases at least, as *Prospice*. *The Meditation* contains this memorable passage:

> When after some delays, some dying strife,
> The soul stands shivering on the ridge of life;
> With what a dreadful curiosity
> Does she launch out into the sea of vast Eternity!

With equally arresting phrase the same question is presented in *The Prospect:*

> What a strange moment will that be,
> My soul, how full of curiosity,
> When wing'd, and ready for thy eternal flight
> On th' utmost edges of thy tottering clay,
> Hovering and wishing longer stay,
> Thou shalt advance, and have Eternity in sight!
> When just about to try that unknown sea,
> What a strange moment will that be!

And as a last illustration none better could be found than John Donne's vivid metaphor:

> Death is but a Groome,
> Which brings a Taper to the outward roome,
> Whence thou spiest first a little glimmering light,
> And after brings it nearer to thy sight:
> For such approaches doth heaven make in death.[120]

Two pieces of prose literature handle the theme of death finely, though in different spirit. One of them, Drummond's *Cypresse Grove,* has already been noticed. The other is *Pilgrim's Progress.* At the end of his journey Christian catches a distant glimpse of the heavenly city. He and his companions cross the river with difficulty and ascend the mountain in the company of two angels. "You are going now, said they, to the Paradise of God, wherein you shall see the Tree of Life, and eat of the never-fading fruits thereof: and when you come there you shall have white Robes given you, and your walk and talk shall be every day with the

[119] *Hydriotaphia,* ch. 5.

[120] *Second Anniversary,* ll. 85-89.

King, even all the days of Eternity." Overcome with emotion, Bunyan exclaims, "Oh! by what tongue or pen can their glorious joy be expressed?" Nevertheless, despite the fervor of this description, the author is not altogether a mystic. The terrible plight of Ignorance as the dream ends, and the morbid fears of Christian himself at the fording, are in no wise consonant with the hope and the brotherly charity of the mystic faith.

In true mysticism neither death nor birth is regarded as affecting any profound change in man's spiritual life. Indeed, the mystic does not isolate this world from the next. Heaven is conceived not as a place remote and different from this world, but as a spiritual state or condition. This old opinion was held by the Cambridge Platonists. Benjamin Whichcote, for example, believed that "Heaven is first a Temper, and then a Place," and that "it is not possible for a man to be made happy, by putting him into a happy place, unless he be in a good state." In the *Discourses* of John Smith the same teaching is found. "As the Kingdom of Heaven is not so much without men as within,—so the tyranny of the Devil and Hell is not so much in some external things as in the qualities and dispositions of men's minds," and "wherever there is beauty, harmony, goodness, love, ingenuity, wisdom, holiness, justice, and the like,—there is God." [121]

Poets like Vaughan, who felt the presence of God everywhere in nature, would naturally accept all this as true. The thought, however, was never expressed more finely than by Sir Thomas Browne in the *Religio Medici:*

> Now, the necessary Mansions of our restored selves are those two contrary and incompatible places we call Heaven and Hell. . . . St. John's description by Emerals, Chrysolites, and precious Stones, is too weak to express the material Heaven we behold. Briefly, therefore, where the soul hath the full measure and complement of happiness; where the boundless appetite of that spirit remains compleatly satisfied, that it can neither desire addition nor alteration; that, I think, is truly Heaven. . . . Wherever God will thus manifest himself, there is Heaven, though within the circle of this sensible world.[122]

English literary mystics have seen nothing abnormal in their attitude toward life. In fact, the norm would seem to them to be just this:

[121] E. T. Campagnac, p. xxxi, and J. Tulloch, 2, p. 188.
[122] Pt. I, sect. 49.

> Methinks I see a ray,
> A glorious beam break through Heav'ns canopy;
> Me thinks I hear a voice, Come Soul, and see,
> Come; here, here lies thy rest; rest in my Word, & Me.[123]

But although they have possessed only natural human faculties, the mystics have developed some of them at the expense of others. One writer on the subject detects in the mystic temperament these marked trails; a strong subjectivity; a full development of the sub-conscious faculties; and a sensitiveness to environment.[124] Only by Catholic writers has the mystic's vision been regarded as at all supernatural, a special gift to the chosen few.[125]

English mysticism, therefore, has been notably sane and reasonable. This statement, however, should not be taken to imply that mysticism in general has been marked for its vagaries in thought or conduct. The great mystics the world over have been practical, helpful men and women. Nowhere could be found more sound teaching than this of Master Eckhart: "Some people pride themselves on their detachment from mankind, and are glad to be alone or in church; and therein lies their peace. But he who is truly in the right state, is so in all circumstances, and among all persons." [126] With the same concern for actual, everyday duties, Ruysbrock stressed such virtues as obedience, patience, gentleness, kindness, and self-sacrifice. So also Juan de Valdes wrote: "Day by day I acquire a stronger conviction that the Christian should be concerned about experience, and not about theoretical knowledge. . . . His business is not learned by speculation, but by experience." [127] Again, to the early Platonist Pico della Mirandola is attributed the statement: "Love God we rather may, than either know Him, or by speech utter Him." Everywhere among the greater English mystics, from Walter Hilton's time to our own, one finds this concern for conduct and the ordinary duties of life.

There would be no reason to deny that numerous sects in Puritan England were guilty of all kinds of extravagances. Even some of the extreme mystics who can hardly be classed with these sectaries, as they were called, laid great stress on miraculous revelations by

[123] Phineas Fletcher, *Religious Musings. Paraphrase—upon Ecclesiastes.*
[124] C. H. Hamilton, *Psychological Interpretation of Mysticism.*
[125] See Sharpe, *Mysticism: Its true Nature and Value.*
[126] Inge, *Light, Life and Love*, p. 12.
[127] *Divine Considerations*, no. 57, Translated by Ferrar.

vision, spiritual voices, and the like. The voices that directed Bunyan and Cromwell need scarcely be mentioned here. Sir Simon d'Ewes recounts in his autobiography, as Bunyan does in *Grace Abounding,* the several occasions where his life was spared by divine intervention. George Fox tells in his *Journal* of the guidance he received from heavenly voices and visions. Baxter in his *Remains* cites similar instances of God's watchful care over him; for "the marvelous Preservation of Souldiers by Bibles in their Pockets which have received the Bullets, and such like I will not mention." [128] Lastly, Lord Herbert tells us in his *Autobiography* how he hesitated to publish his treatise *De Veritate,* though Hugo Grotius urged it, till, in response to a prayer, "a loud though yet gentle noise came from the heavens," which he took as a sign that he should print his book.

But of such miraculous agencies English men of letters have little to say. Their mysticism sprang purely from deep spirituality. Impelled by that alone, Nicholas Ferrar left his responsible position in the Virginia Company to found the religious community at Little Gidding. There he lived in peaceful retirement, seeking God in the daily routine of study and worship, and educating others to find God in the same way. Many other men and women of the seventeenth century lived equally spiritual lives.

Deep spirituality, therefore, fills the literature of the century. Some of the mystical writers were philosophers and theologians, like John Norris and the Cambridge Platonists. Some were quiet, meditative men like Drummond. There were scientists, also, like Sir Thomas Browne, and other busy men of the world, though we may think of them, as we think of Vaughan, as simply God-inspired poets. Some gave their lives wholly to religion, as Traherne did and Ferrar, while others lived close to the rapidly moving current of life. Was not Plotinus right, therefore, when he wrote to Flaccus: "There are different roads by which this end (the apprehension of the Infinite) may be reached. The love of beauty, which exalts the poet; that devotion to the One and that ascent of science which makes the ambition of the philosopher; and that love and those prayers by which some devout and ardent soul tends in its moral purity towards perfection. These are the great highways conducting to that height above the actual and particular, where

[128] *Reliquiæ,* p. 46.

we stand in the immediate presence of the Infinite, who shines out as from the deeps of the soul."

It would be interesting to trace the influence of these seventeenth-century writers on the poets who succeeded them. Donne was proclaimed at once "the great lord of wit"; but his power rested on the least mystical elements of his verse—his restless, daring intelligence, the spell of his strange fancies, his rugged, tortuous expression. Traherne, on the contrary, remained absolutely unknown until almost the close of the last century. A copy of Henry Vaughan's poems was among the books disposed of when Wordsworth's library was sold. Coleridge, himself the most subtle metrist of his day, praised the versification of Crashaw highly. And one might feel that not only he and Pope, but Coventry Patmore, later, and Francis Thompson learned much from the Catholic mystic. Indeed, a great deal that seems distinctive in the poets of the Romantic Movement, much, for example, of Wordsworth's supposed indebtedness to Rousseau, comes to seem rather a part of the common spiritual inheritance of the English people from the earlier period. The romantic poets simply caught up again certain threads of thought and feeling that had been dropped in the weave of Augustan literature. The love for nature, the respect for man as man, the appreciation of childhood, and subjectivity were no new elements in English thought.

What, then, can mysticism be, if it has been furthered by men of such markedly different temperaments and if its influence has been so universal? Possibly no definition can be framed that will seem both precise and sufficiently inclusive; for mysticism, as a movement, in allowing the freest expression of personality, has sacrificed centripetal force. It may be sufficient to say, in conclusion, that the word designates a certain attitude toward self, the outer world of experience, and the unseen world of spirit. Three illustrations may help to explain this. Of himself, the great subjective poet, Thomas Traherne, cried:

> Thou which within me art, yet me! Thou eye,
> And temple of His whole infinity!
> O what a world art Thou! [129]

Of the relation of this spiritual force, self, toward the material world Sir Thomas Browne, near the close of *Hydriotaphia,*

[129] *My Spirit.*

expressed the mystics's point of view. "Pious spirits," he wrote, "who have passed their days in raptures of futurity, made little more of this world, than the world that was before it, while they lay obscure in the chaos of preordination, and night of their forebeings . . . . They have already had an handsome anticipation of heaven; the glory of the world is surely over, and the earth in ashes unto them." This anticipation of Heaven that Browne spoke of was enjoyed by Henry Vaughan, and the highest expression of the English mystic's vision is to be found in his two fine poems:

I saw Eternity the other night
Like a great Ring of pure and endless light,
All calm, as it was bright,

and

They are all gone into the world of light!
And I alone sit lingering here;
Their very memory is fair and bright,
And my sad thoughts doth clear.

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